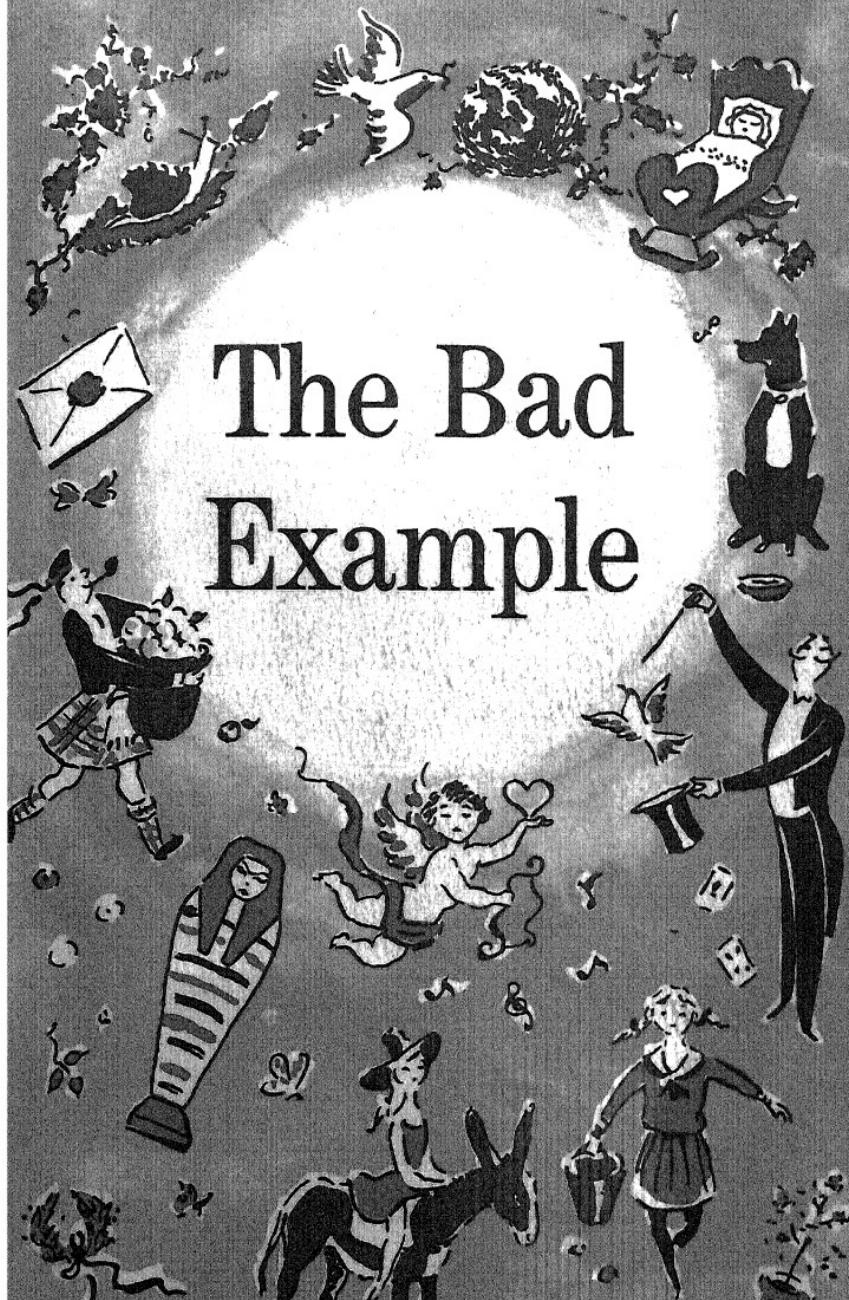




IRMGARD KEUN

# The Bad Example





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"Grownups can do anything they please but children can't do anything at all—and what happens when a grownup's so sore he can't see straight? He takes it out on some kid!" This is the considered opinion reached by the ten-year-old heroine of this book and duly recorded in her diary. "If people think a child doesn't have worries, they're very dumb. A child certainly has more worries than grownups."

Here is the story of the exploits of a tomboy, leader of a gang known as the Devilish Desperadoes, and general terror of the neighborhood. But it is much more than that. With amazing psychological insight the author has been able to catch all the anxiety and despair of a growing human creature amid the lies and deceits of an adult world. If Holden Caulfield's young sister in *The Catcher in the Rye* had kept a diary (and had lived in Germany) the result might very well have been this book.

Nobody was allowed to play with her. The incidents that led up to this punishment are both hilarious and touching,

(Continued on back flap)

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# 7 DAY BOOK

THE BAD EXÁMPLÉ



IRMGARD KEUN

*The Bad Example*



Translated from the German by

Leila Berg and Ruth Baer

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

*New York*



THE BAD EXAMPLE



# I

## *My Will*

My parents are always on the teachers' side, and that's why I went next door to Mr. Kleinerz straight after school, and told him everything.

Mr. Kleinerz is old, he is at least forty, and that's why it's impossible for him to have any more children. Everybody says my father brought me into this world. I don't know how he managed this, but I can see you must be very special to be able to do a thing like that, just as if it were nothing at all, so my father deserves all our admiration. Wherever can I have been before?

Mr. Kleinerz hasn't a wife now. My mother said he really didn't deserve to be saddled with such a woman and that she even got him into debt before she left.

He always lets me go into his garden, and sometimes baby birds fall out of their nests and then we try to bring them up and take care of them, but they nearly always die because they have an internal injury, and they want to be back with their parents again, and they go on cheeping until they are dead. It is terribly sad

### *The Bad Example*

about the baby birds. Up to now, only one thrush has pulled through.

I discuss everything with Mr. Kleinerz and my father asks his advice quite often about taxes. Mr. Kleinerz told me that people should be kind to one another, but they should never let other people make fools of them. I told him all about Miss Scherwelbein—and I asked him to invite my parents, and Aunt Milly too, to his house on Saturday, the day of the funeral, so that they shouldn't go to the cemetery and see that I'm the only one in the whole school who is not allowed to be there.

I don't really understand how the whole thing happened. I simply don't understand why. First of all, I just missed the tram. And when that happens I am always late for school. I was very surprised when I got into the corridor and heard the noise from the classrooms, because it was ten past eight by then. There was no teacher there yet. So I made a bit of a noise too. Not very much though. I only put a few burrs on that silly drip Trautchen Meiser, because she's always telling tales about me and isn't allowed to play with me, because her mother is my great enemy. My friend Elli Puckbaum laughed out loud, and Trautchen screamed—then Miss Knoll, our class teacher, came in. Everything went dead quiet; Trautchen's hair was full of burrs and Miss Knoll's eyes were red. I felt as if a knife had gone right through my stomach, and my face was hot, and I didn't know where to look because Miss Knoll had been crying. I can't bear

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to see grownups crying. It always means something dreadful has happened, because grownups hardly ever cry.

Miss Knoll's nose was red and swollen, and her voice was that way too. "Children, something infinitely sad has happened. Our adored headmistress, our universally respected Miss Scherwelbein has died." Then she sniffed the way people always scold me for at table. And then everything was quiet, and after that some of the girls flung their arms on their desks and put their heads down and cried, so that everyone could hear. In front of me, Trautchen's shoulders were shaking and the burrs in her hair were wobbling.

"Children, poor children," Old Knoll said, "do try to restrain your grief." And she sobbed. It was terrible. I wanted to do something too, so I put up my hand and asked, "What did she die of, then?" I have often heard, honestly, that that is the right thing to ask, and I didn't mean to do anything wrong. But Miss Knoll snapped out that I was an unfeeling child, and that there were no tears in my eyes, and that I should try to realize that I would never see Miss Scherwelbein again from now until the end of my life. "Children, the majesty of death is touching you now. For the rest of your life you will none of you ever see Miss Scherwelbein again."

Then some of the girls cried again, out loud. I got goose pimples on my arms, and all I could say—I said it

### *The Bad Example*

softly—was, “But I never *have* seen her, anyway.” That is absolutely true. Because we’re only just beginning our third year, and Miss Scherwelbein was terribly old and she’d been ill for a long time, and we only know the deputy headmistress, Miss Schnei. Nobody but Elli has ever seen Miss Scherwelbein—she was walking with a stick and she had eyes like bits of glass, and her head wobbled. I thought of our squirrel that died too. It was as beautiful as the magic things in a shiny picture book, and it was gay, and it did acrobatics in my hair, and suddenly one morning it was dead because it had eaten an indelible pencil off my father’s desk. I died a little too after that, and our home was quite different and nothing was nice any more.

And then I thought of the rag woman. She is also terribly old with a wobbly head, and we always look after her since Hans started our gang, the Devilish Desperadoes.

When I started to remember about my squirrel and began thinking that the rag woman might also die soon, I was on the very edge of crying myself—but just then Old Knoll said, “Fie, child, fie!” and said that I should be ashamed, and that I should look deep into my own heart. And then she said, “*Now* are you ashamed of yourself? *Now* are you sad?”

All the children stopped crying and looked at me, and took deep breaths. I had promised my mother that I would never let the demon of rage enter my soul. But

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when they all stared at me in that horrible way, then an absolutely red-hot demon of rage entered my soul, and I was glad it did and I stamped my feet and shouted, "I'm *not* ashamed. I'm *not* sad. I'm *not* ashamed."

Now all the girls are allowed to go to the funeral, walking by twos on Saturday afternoon, and they have to wear white dresses with black sashes, and they will each be given a bunch of white roses. But I am not allowed to go because I blasphemed in the face of death.

During recess the others wouldn't speak to me. They all thought themselves terrifically important and carried on as if they had died themselves. I walked around by myself, and pretended I didn't care at all, and I was frozen up like ice. At first when I was on the playground, I wanted to give Trautchen Meiser and Minchen Lenz a good kick on the shins. But the demon of rage wasn't in my soul any more, and my feet were quite tired, and I didn't feel like kicking anyone. And then I remembered that Elli didn't cry either, nor did quite a few of the others, so I thought they'd come up to me and talk to me. But they didn't come up to me, and when I looked at them they behaved just like grownups you've never seen before do when you stare at them.

Then I wished I was dead myself. But I didn't show it, and I ate my sandwiches and didn't even notice what was in them. And I didn't even care that I'd really

### *The Bad Example*

meant to swap the liver sausage one for Selma's cough drops.

I felt sick, and I went into the corridor so that no one should see how I felt. I had to go very secretly on tiptoe because none of us is allowed to go anywhere except the playground during recess. You're not even allowed to get away when no one wants to have anything to do with you.

Old Knoll was standing in a dark corner with our gym teacher, Miss Teigern. And Miss Knoll said now that Old Scherwelbein was dead, they mightn't keep her on any more—they wouldn't care how deserving she was. And she had a mother to look after, and what would become of her now. She started bawling again, and this time I felt glad, and Miss Teigern said, oh well, she was so old and so ill, it was really all for the best, and if it brought some new blood into the school it would probably turn out to be a very good thing.

When I said at home that Miss Scherwelbein had died, my mother said at once, "Oh, what did she die of?" And Aunt Milly said just the same. Grownups are always allowed to do everything, and children can't do anything. I wanted to say then that I wasn't allowed to go to the funeral, but Aunt Milly started going on about the five big preserving jars that she'd found this morning behind my shelf. The only reason I ate the pumpkin from that one jar was simply that I needed it. The other jars were all empty anyway. I'd put different caterpillars

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into them and they had turned into pupas. I had wonderful fuzzy-wuzzy ones, tiger caterpillars all red and yellow like little brushes, and brown woolly bear caterpillars, and some smooth silkworms, and some really special moth caterpillars—wonderfully green with shining red spots. I had done nothing for ages except look for caterpillars. I'd had no time to do anything else at all. I *had* to have a separate jar for each kind because they fight. Anyone could see that, except Aunt Milly. And the caterpillars had already turned into pupas. Soon they would have been butterflies and I would have taken them into the woods and watched them fly away. I had real cocoons in these preserving jars, and at home they just thought it was dirt and they scraped everything out of the jars and they shouted at me. Then I felt I just couldn't bear it because they had smashed up my cocoons, and I didn't care about anything any more and I'll never say another word to anyone and I'll go and live by myself.

Saturday morning we all had to go to the gym. I had to sit in a corner, and the others had to stand up in twos and rehearse how they would go to the funeral in the afternoon. My parents were going too, even though Mr. Kleinerz had specially asked them to his house so that they wouldn't. When I tell them that I'm not allowed to go, my mother will cry and lose her faith in me.

There are supposed to be four children in each row, but there were only three in the last. Old Knoll came to me

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and said, like a liar, that she would forgive me if I was sincerely sorry, and that if I promised in front of all the other children to reform she would let me go too, and Trautchen would be willing to give me her hand. But I would never give such a drip my hand and walk in the same row with her for hours and hours. And anyway Trautchen Meiser *wasn't* willing to give me her hand, and the two others in the back row where the gap was looked quite horrified at the thought of me going with them. So I thought of Mr. Kleinerz, and I told Miss Knoll that I did not allow anyone to make a fool of me and that now I didn't want to go any more.

I left home in a white frock and a black sash. My Aunt Milly said, "The child looks positively touching." I acted just as if I was going to school to join in the funeral procession. And then I walked round the Green, and I got frozen stiff.

I could see my parents standing in front of the cemetery in Aachen Street, waiting for the procession. There were crowds of people. I crept slowly closer, and then the funeral procession came along. The horses were very black, and the music was slow and heavy—the air was like a sad mist, and all the men took off their hats. My heart started thumping in a funny hollow way, and I kept getting closer to my parents and Aunt Milly.

The children all walked past with white roses in their hands. Lots of women were crying, and I could hear Aunt Milly sobbing and saying, "Oh, how moving! Oh,

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what a wonderful funeral!" and she stood on tiptoe. She's just the same at weddings.

My mother just said over and over again, "But where is the child?" And she had my coat over her arm. And she was looking for me and she didn't care about seeing anything, she only wanted to see me and give me my coat so that I wouldn't get frozen and catch my death of cold. So then I couldn't help crying myself. I cried dreadfully and I called out to her and she had an awful shock.

I told her everything that had happened, how I had blasphemed in the face of death and everything, and I promised to reform.

In the evening Mr. Kleinerz came and brought me his largest winter pear. But I didn't eat it. I gave it to my mother, and she shared it with me. I had to give some to Aunt Milly too, but I only did this for my mother's sake, because Aunt Milly said I had disgraced the family. But my mother just stroked my hair. This was funny really because generally she is in league with the teachers and backs them up against me.

Then I made a will for when I die. Mr. Kleinerz helped me. I shall breed some new cocoons and I shall leave them to my mother. And I expressly forbid Miss Knoll and Trautchen Meiser and Minchen Lenz to come to my funeral.

*The Devilish Desperadoes*

Last night I couldn't sleep because I was thinking of the bloody revenge we were going to take on Mrs. Meiser. We call her Old Poison Pudding.

But it didn't make any difference, because I always feel tired in the mornings. I dawdle while I am dressing, and let the water run very fast in the bathroom so that they think I am washing. But all the time I'm sitting on the edge of the bathtub, sleeping a bit more. That's why I'm late for school so often.

Hans Lachs says it is wrong to harness children to the furious pace of modern life. He read this in a real grown-up book. And Mr. Kleinerz from next door said to my father that the laborer is worthy of his hire. He reserved the right to say whatever he liked to his boss, but he wouldn't be so stupid as to work for nothing. But children do have to work for nothing, and they never get any thanks for it. Only aggravation.

Of course, Minchen Lenz and Trautchen Meiser sometimes get "Good Work" cards with a picture of Mary and the Child Jesus. I have never got one yet. Any-

### *The Devilish Desperadoes*

way, I like transfers and Japanese water flowers better. I sit with my mother—she is wearing her blue velvety blouse, the electric light is squeaking like a cricket, the room has a lovely warm smell, and we are all by ourselves—and we put the flowers in water in a bowl. They are quite small to start with, and crumpled. And then they get bigger and bigger, and brightly colored, and flower in front of our eyes. I am so happy then that I can't say a word, and I feel like crying, and I want to pray that I'll never give anyone any trouble any more. And sometimes we let walnut shells with tiny lights float in the bowl. Then they are small boats sailing on a wildly rocking sea toward strange islands, and I protect their lights and rule over them like God.

Minchen Lenz and Trautchen Meiser can't be in the Devilish Desperadoes because they scream if you put cockroaches down their throats. No one can join if they don't pass their test. We have to have a test because we must be strong, to fight for the Good and the Noble. I swallowed quite a large piece of earthworm for my test, and then brought it back into my mouth again just like someone in a circus. And then I crept into the policeman's garden and kidnaped a pumpkin. So now I'm a Rival—that's the second-highest in the gang.

The highest of all is Hans. He is the Vice-King. Hans knows all these words from books. After that comes Secretary. Otto Weber is Secretary. As well as those we have Idols and Fetishes. They are all boys, a year

### *The Bad Example*

younger than us. There are four Idols and one Fetish altogether. Of course, we could have Privates too, but then they would have wanted to become officers after a while, or get promoted some way or other, and we can't have that sort of thing because there's only room for the three top people in our cave in the woods. As a matter of fact, there's really only room for half the third chief. That's why we have to have the Idols and Fetishes roaming about always, and have to keep thinking of things for them to find out. It's terribly difficult for us sometimes to keep on thinking of something new for them to do, and sometimes they're really just a nuisance to us. But of course we have to have them, because if we didn't we wouldn't be the three top ones.

I would hate to become a General when I'm older, because a General has thousands and thousands of soldiers. I wouldn't know what to do with them from morning to night. Perhaps real Generals don't know either, and that's why they let all the soldiers get killed. Mr. Kleinerz told me that Generals always want war. They only want peace when the war is lost anyway, and then they retire and grow roses.

There is a General living in our house, in the bottom apartment. No one ever sees him. I have only seen his wooden leg. It is a leg with a shoe on it, and cloth. When I go to school in the morning, sometimes the General's orderly is standing outside the door, brushing the leg. I am a bit afraid of the leg and I never dare

### *The Devilish Desperadoes*

really to look at it, but at the same time I would love to touch it, just once. Some of my dolls' legs used to come off sometimes, but they still hung on by elastic. With a General's legs it is quite different.

Sometimes when I'm in our cave I think I'd rather be a Fetish really. But then Hans would look down on me, and I wouldn't be allowed in the cave, and I couldn't give orders. But sometimes I get so bored lying on those cold stones, and I nearly freeze to death.

When the Idols and Fetishes come back after their roamings, Hans calls out in a booming voice "Idols and Fetishes, bow down before the stones of our fortress!" And then they bow down. "What did your eagle eye perceive?" says the Vice-King. And they tell him what they have discovered. They have to tell it in unison, all five of them, because that is how a Greek Chorus talks. I have always been against this Greek Chorus, and it was having it that sealed our doom.

Hans knows about the Greek Chorus from his father, because he is a professor and teaches Greek. I love my father because he isn't a teacher and doesn't make a nuisance of himself, always meddling with people's homework. But Hans said one should not praise the day before it is over, and that there was plenty of time for my father to suddenly become a teacher. But my father said that at his age you don't change about any more, and he had quite enough trouble with me, without having a whole classful of children. My mother said that

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in any case he had a bad temper, and that was not good in a teacher. Then my father turned bright blue and red, and his voice roared like terrible thunder through the room, and he was quite beside himself, banging his fists on the table. He said he was the mildest of men. He never thought of anything except his family, and no one had any right to call him bad-tempered. Then he rushed out.

It was already past seven, right in the middle of the night. But he came back very quickly with cream cakes. I absolutely adore cream cakes. My mother said this was really thoughtful for a man. But she said it very softly, because if my father ever hears her say that he is a thoughtful man he gets in a temper again, and thunders louder than ever.

I would have liked to tell my father that I'm a Rival now, but we took an oath in front of the Vice-King to keep everything secret, because, if we told, the Stony Eye of Fo would turn into a flame to consume us. *The Stony Eye of Fo* is a famous book, and it gave us the idea for our stony eye. Ours is a genuine cornelian. It is initiated with our blood, and we always have to carry it around with us.

It is our duty to help the weak and oppressed. We cannot escape this duty. Even when the grownups don't understand, we still have to do it. Even that business with the child in white must not discourage us.

What actually happened was that the Idols and Fe-

### *The Devilish Desperadoes*

tishes came roaming toward our cave and announced in Greek chorus, "On the deserted steppe by the rushing water stands a lonely little child."

"Java and Togo!" shouted Hans. That is our war cry. So we all rushed to the Garden of Remembrance by the paddling pool, and a little girl in a white frock was there.

"Java and Togo!" we all shouted. And we surrounded the little girl simply because we were going to rescue her. We meant to revive her with a drink in our cave, and then restore her to her parents. But the silly little idiot screamed at the top of her voice. Maybe it was the red ink the three of us had smeared on our faces for blood.

If we hadn't all been making such a row we should have heard that man storming up in the most furious temper. As it is we shall have to expiate our burning shame for seven long years, because the bloodthirsty cad smacked our Vice-King's face—and the Fetishes'. And mine.

All sorts of people came dashing up, and the blood-thirsty cad shouted out that we'd been going to hurt his poor innocent child. People started shouting, "Shame on you, you nasty lot!" and Mrs. Meiser was there, Old Poison Pudding, screeching, "I know them!"

When we ran away, the child in white ran after us. She wasn't crying any more. She wanted to play with

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us. But we don't play with such small children. We only rescue them.

Well, Old Poison Pudding told my parents everything later on that evening. And before she tattled to our parents, she sat on a bench and spied on our cave, and betrayed us to our worst enemy, a really evil gamekeeper. We call him the Crawling Beast of the Forest. That is exactly what he is. There is a good keeper too—we call him the Lord of the Jungle, and we protect him, and we have dug his garden too, and he gave us some buttermilk and made us a fire for baking potatoes.

So we sat in our cave, we three chiefs, and we talked it all over, and the Vice-King's cheek was swollen as if he had been stung by a bee. When we were on our holidays, my mother and Aunt Milly and all the women always used to shout and scream and wave their arms in the most curious way whenever any wasps, with their long-ringed fierce-looking bodies started buzzing round the plum tart at afternoon tea. They were even more terrified of bees. And as for bumblebees, which are like cosy purring velvet cushions, they thought they were the most dangerous of the lot. So once I went secretly to a tree in the forest, and I took a bee off a leaf and held it in my hand till it stung me. It wasn't very bad for me, but it was bad for the bee. It wasted its sting and couldn't get another one. My hand got rather swollen but nothing else happened—and I had thought

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the world would be changed through the sting of a bee.

Well, when we were sitting there in our cave, suddenly the Idols and Fetishes rushed in, trembling with excitement. And the Vice-King commanded them, "Bow down in front of the stones of our rocky fortress!" And they bowed down, and called out in Greek chorus which they have to practice over and over again before they can say it right, "The Crawling Beast of the Forest draws near, O Master!" But the Crawling Beast of the Forest was not drawing near at all. Just as they said "O Master!" the Crawling Beast was there, right in front of our cave.

The Idols and Fetishes roamed away at once, without being commanded. We three Chiefs sat captive in our cave, and Otto, who sat half outside because he is only the third highest, got a smack. That was because we aren't really allowed to make caves in the forest—and also because there was that business with the fir tree. But that is nothing but a nasty suspicion. Only the rag woman really knows about it.

She is very old, the rag woman, and poor, with red eyes and trembling hands. We stop the other children from shouting "Witch!" after her, or throwing stones at her. But they hardly ever try to now, because they are afraid of us.

We cut down the fir tree last Christmas. Really we only cut it halfway. It fell down the rest by itself. If we hadn't cut it down, the rag woman would have been

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without a Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. The tree was so big, and the rag woman's room so small, that we couldn't stand the tree up. We had to lay it across the room. It looked like a wilderness . . . as if the tree was asleep. There was no room for anyone to move in the room, not even the rag woman.

We stood at the open door, and looked at the tree, and sang "Silent night, Holy night." The rag woman sniffed very happily and said, "My, what a blaze I'll get out of this when the needles have fallen off!"

Of course, we'll have to build a new cave now, because Old Poison Pudding has betrayed us. Then we'll have to hide our secret treasure, and after that take our revenge on Old Poison Pudding.

As a matter of fact, I know a new cave already. In the afternoon we are going down to the deep pond at the back of my father's factory. You have to slide down steep sand hills, full of sharp pebbles. Hans says it is a lonely slumbering gorge. On the banks of the raging lake we shall make our new cave.

My father has given strict orders that we are never to play there, because the sand could suddenly fall in and smother us. But actually we don't play there. We fight for the Good and the Noble. And in the pond we can catch tadpoles, and put them into our best preserving jars to develop.

I said we could give Mrs. Meiser a terrific fright with the skull, because she is a terrible coward except where

### *The Devilish Desperados*

her husband is concerned. He said the other day, in the bar of the Last Madonna, that she was an old hag and he was sick and tired of her. She has even told him to shoot the blackbirds in their front garden.

They live on the ground floor, so I could easily climb onto their window sill in the evening and hold the skull against the windowpane. But Hans thought this wouldn't be good enough. We ought to throw the skull right into her room. I thought that was a better idea too, but Otto said if we did, we wouldn't have the skull any more. The skull really belongs to Otto. His father is a doctor. He had the skull on his desk when he was a student, and then he didn't want it any more so he put it in a box with some other things and took it up into the attic. Otto brought it down again and gave it to the gang for treasure, and that was how we came to make him Secretary. Before that he was just a Fetish. It is a glorious big skull, and we'll certainly have to find some way of getting it back.

We all tried throwing, to see who could throw best, and I did the best even though I'm a girl, and it was decided I should be the one to throw the skull.

Everything was dark and quite still. The houses and the front gardens swam about mysteriously, colorlessly. We three Chiefs were hidden in the Meisers' front garden. The Idols and Fetishes kept watch everywhere. It was terribly dangerous, because my parents live above the Meisers and Dr. Weber is next door.

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There was a light on in Mrs. Meiser's sitting room, and she was on the sofa, all by herself. Otto started things off by throwing a little stone that we brought from the cave at her window—very artistically, so that the window didn't break because we didn't want any more of that kind of trouble. Then Hans threw another one, then Otto again . . . then Hans whispered, "Get ready!" Mrs. Meiser rolled off the sofa and tore open the window and screamed out, "Who is throwing things?" At that very second I flung the skull right past her head into the room. Then Old Poison Pudding went tearing back again. We pressed ourselves right against the wall and closed our eyes so that no one could see us. We could hear Old Poison Pudding screeching at the top of her voice. And then we all ran away.

Well, we all went straight home and did our homework, and my mother said to my father I might even yet turn out a good, quiet child. Then my father said he didn't trust my good, quiet ways, because he had gained his knowledge of mankind by bitter experience. But my mother said instantly that experience was nothing compared with the infallible instinct of a mother.

Then everything got frightful. Dr. Weber recognized the skull at once. That just shows you what liars grownups are. They're always saying death makes all men equal.

Later on Mr. Meiser came round to speak to my parents. His wife sent him. She had had a nervous

### *The Devilish Desperadoes*

breakdown because someone had thrown a skull at her. She had even telephoned for the police. We all had to go round to the Meisers' flat, even Otto Weber, who had already gone to bed. There were the three of us and our parents and a policeman. Mrs. Meiser sat on the sofa, very fat and round in a common sort of dressing-gown, and beside her was that horrible fat Trautchen with her silly curls; we call her the Maggot because she is so white and wobbly. And the Maggot stared with her nasty glittering eyes and kept saying, "Oh how wicked of you," in her squeaky voice.

Of course, everyone talked at once at us, in the most frightful way. We all kept manfully silent, and sometimes shrugged our shoulders. Then suddenly I discovered I didn't have the Stony Eye of Fo with me. I knew at once everything would go wrong. Mrs. Meiser started screaming that the skull was from someone we'd murdered. The policeman sighed, looking very unhappy about it all. He said, "Have a heart, lady." He had other things to do, he said, and he really must be going.

But then I felt absolutely furious about it all, because we hadn't murdered anyone, and Trautchen kept staring in that nasty greedy way of hers and Mrs. Meiser kept stroking her and saying, "How upsetting for the sweet delicate child!" So I said, quite simply, that none of us had thrown the skull, but I knew for a fact that sometimes the bones of ancestors came flying through

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the air of their own accord if someone was being mean and sinful, just to warn them to behave themselves.

Then Mr. Meiser, who was sitting in the corner, nodded his head and said that seemed quite possible.

My father's eyes got quite round, and he said very quietly and seriously that was enough. He got hold of my hand and took me away and spanked me hard. And he said he would teach me about the bones of ancestors flying of their own accord.

When I went to school this morning, I met Mr. Meiser, and he gave me a mark. I'm not to tell anyone about it. His wife has become quite meek, he said. And he told me to buy some cakes for the whole gang.

Hans has already made a plan to get our skull back, and for getting our revenge on the Maggot. We are going to buy a fishing rod with the mark. Then we can fish for pike in the pond, in the evenings.

## 3

*The Instrument of God*

It is terrible how I have to suffer just because God chose me as His instrument. I keep reminding myself of John the Baptist. God chose him too, and he ate locusts in the desert. Perhaps that was even more terrible than all the things I am going through now.

The whole thing is Trautchen's fault. She is not a child, but a natural-born criminal. Hans says so too.

Every evening I pray to God, asking him to do something to Trautchen because I'm not allowed to. "Vengeance is Mine," saith the Lord. But then I began to think that the Lord must have made me His instrument, because there wasn't a sign of any vengeance on Trautchen, and it was three days now since she told on me about the transfers, and my father had to pay for new wallpaper even though he was nearly broke.

Trautchen Meiser is not only in my class, but we used to live in the same house too. Trautchen's father was our landlord. He is tubby and nice, and I often ask myself how such a man came to have such a child. Trautchen is tubby too, but not a bit nice, just fat and white

### *The Bad Example*

and wobbly and sly, which is why the Devilish Desperadoes call her the Maggot. My mother says that Mr. Meiser is rather fond of lifting his elbow. But I have watched him very closely and I have never noticed that he lifts his elbow or any other part of his arm particularly. Now we are having a row with them because of the wallpaper, and because I made Trautchen look such a fright.

The whole thing started with me finding the mark, and having to wear a back-straightener. When we were at Andernach on the Rhine in the summer holidays, I was always finding things.

Once I found a man's wedding ring, and later on I found a funny pointed stone. My father got very excited about it and shouted, "A fossil! A fossil!" He showed it to the magistrate at our boardinghouse, who always eats all his wife's pudding at lunchtime, and he had the idea of giving it to a museum. But the shoeshine boy discovered that it was a stone for sharpening scythes, without any special name and quite without any antique value.

The wedding ring my father took to a lost property office. My mother always says my father is as honest as the day is long, and she sometimes considers he carries things too far. Then, when we went to Brohl, I found a little silver bag just before we left. I found it because I was looking for some particularly interesting poisonous mushrooms, the kind that are all the colors of the

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rainbow. I wanted to plant lots of them at home. But my mother said the reason I was always finding things on the ground was because I walked in such a hunched-up fashion, and that I should have to wear a back-straightener.

I have discussed it all with Mr. Kleinerz next door, and he said I could claim a reward. But I didn't get any reward because my father refused to take it. Aunt Milly said instantly to my mother that this showed the man's completely unnecessary pride. With all due respect, she couldn't express herself in any other way.

It's all the same to me about the reward, because I would never have got my hands on it anyway. They would have put it into my bank for me. I'm not allowed to keep the bank myself, and it's impossible to break it open. Sometimes they shake it in my ears so that I can hear how nice it sounds and how full it's getting. That is supposed to encourage me to grow into a well-behaved child who gets good reports. And also it's supposed to teach me the value of money. But how can a bank encourage me, and help me to be well-behaved! What is the use of the money if I can't even buy candy with it, and a penholder that has a snowstorm inside if you give it a shake and hold it in front of your eyes. I would absolutely love to have an awful lot of money for once, and spend it all at the King of Magic on High Street. It's the most beautiful shop in the whole world. I've been there secretly after school lots of times. They have

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streamers and fierce masks and fire crackers and very natural-looking doughnuts filled with confetti, and absolutely real-looking chocolates made out of soap and filled with vinegar, which you can offer people any time. And artificial ink spots, and the "Ideal Broken Window," which is just iron filings that you drop on the floor so that people think their windowpanes have been smashed. Oh there are a thousand things more at the King of Magic, things that are much more mysterious!

I would love to put some of those soap chocolates with the ordinary ones in the bowl when my mother has her tea party. It is always so terribly boring, and I can never see why I always have to go in and say "How do you do?" to all the ladies. They rustle and laugh and talk to each other all the time, and the whole room flutters round me when I have to go in. I never really know what I am supposed to do. I have trouble enough just seeing if there's any chance of getting some cake later on. "What a big girl you are now!" they say, and "How do you like going to school?" and "What have you been doing today?" And in between they talk about singing in the ears, and about a nature doctor, and dwindling fortunes, and first-class mayonnaise, and a fading orchid in the greenhouse, and how a cousin of theirs with a university degree has thrown himself away —I just don't understand what they are talking about. Then I think how I could suddenly put my foot on a few stinkbombs from the King of Magic. How would

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their voices sound then? And what would their faces look like? And what would happen? Perhaps everything would be as beautiful and fascinating as a rainbow. I am always happy when there is a rainbow in the sky. I just can't see how God can make such a lovely thing. Once I even saw a double rainbow.

When I have to be at my mother's tea parties, my mother, too, is like a stranger to me. She speaks and laughs in a completely changed voice, and tugs at me, and I just don't feel at home with her. It's not so much that I'm shy of the visitors. Mostly I'm shy because my mother is so changed, and looks at me so differently.

I wish I could buy a real box of magic at the shop, and give shows and put spells on people. But they don't let me have any money. They would rather buy beastly things for me.

Now they have bought me a back-straightener. Every morning I have to put it on, so I just go straight into the doorway of Pellenz's restaurant and take it off again. After school I put it on again, and when I go and play outside I take it off again secretly and put it on later. It is wretched having this straightener, I have such a lot of trouble with it, and when I am wearing it I can't do any climbing and I can't even move and the straps rub my shoulders all red. My mother sewed some velvet underneath the straps, and that made the beastly thing press even worse.

But when I started to take it off again secretly in the

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morning and saw the velvet my mother had put on, I felt mean about it, and for three whole days I wore the straightener all the time and didn't feel like playing or eating or doing anything. Then I just couldn't stand it any longer. Now I am putting it on and taking it off again the whole time. I have asked God to send a burglar into my room in the night to steal my straightener.

When I found that mark outside school last week, I was going to hand it in at once. But then I thought they will only know I have found something again and start trying to buy more straighteners.

Then I thought I would just drop the money on the ground again, but just then Elli Puckbaum came along so I went with her to Bosselmann's to buy some notebooks. Mr. Bosselmann has the most wonderful things—gummed pictures of every color you can think of with the chalice on them, and rosaries, and felt mice, and transfers. At first there is nothing to see on the transfers, and then you wet them, and press them on a piece of paper, and peel them off—and you have a wonderful glorious thing to look at. Snow White and the dwarfs, and cannibals, and angels, and witches, and animals. It's just like a miracle. Mr. Bosselmann has whole packets of transfers. I thought that perhaps if Elli bought some notebooks from him, then he might give her one of those pictures, and then perhaps he might give me one too.

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I know exactly how grownups talk when they talk business, so I said, "Well, and how is business, Mr. Bosselmann?" And he answered the way grownups do, "Bad, bad," and nodded his head up and down like a real expert. And so it was my turn to answer back again, the way my father does with traveling salesmen sometimes, "Well, just give me anything, Mr. Bosselmann, we don't want to argue about it." And so I bought fifty pennies' worth of transfers. There were so many, so many. I couldn't get my breath, I was so excited. We went to a soda-water stand, and I stood Elli to a glass of lemonade. My father and Mr. Kleinerz sometimes stand about in the bar of the Kolschen when something exciting has happened to them, but my mother doesn't really approve of it.

Then I ran home very quickly, because we were just in the middle of moving. We have moved into the house next door so as to have more room. Our Aunt Milly gets fatter and fatter every day.

When I came home that lunchtime, all the moving was over. It isn't fair the way children are always made to go to school when something really interesting is happening. So I rang Trautchen's bell and we went upstairs into our old apartment that was now absolutely empty, and I showed Trautchen my transfers because I had to show them to somebody and just at that time I couldn't find anyone else. Hans had said he didn't like

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transfers any more. He was going in for a collection of stones now. I'm going to start one of those soon.

Our apartment was quite different and sad, now it was empty. At first I nearly thought my room was the living room. But then I found the real living room, where I was only allowed to play at Christmastime. You can still tell it now because I practiced with my roller skates there on Christmas Eve and it has a parquet floor.

I sat in the corner on a heap of shavings and thought about Christmas. Every year my parents stand by the tree on Christmas Eve. There are rustlings and flickerings inside the tree. The Webers once had a real fire, with the fire department and everything. I am allowed to eat as much as I want. My plate is heaped with candy, and there are some tangerines on it too. And everything smells of fir branches and new toys, and Eau de Cologne and brandy too after my parents say, "Now it's time to open the bottles." My mother always gives my father brandy, and my father gives my mother quarts of Eau de Cologne. But nobody drinks the Eau de Cologne. It's just wasted. They let me stay up till nine o'clock, and we make punch and promise to love one another. When I go to Heaven it will be Christmas all the time, and I do want to become good so that I won't have to go to Hell in the end. That's why I even kiss Aunt Milly at Christmas, which I would never do other times.

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I am not really afraid of God. I always quite enjoy talking to him. I can't bear it when Miss Sevenich says in Scripture class that the eye of God is everywhere. We even have a picture in the school assembly hall where there is a single eye of God painted in between a lot of clouds. It is terrible to think that one eye follows you everywhere. I know a spectacle shop that has big single eyes in the window, just eyes on their own without any other parts of the body. I don't like looking at these either. And I don't want single bits of God. I always want Him whole.

I told Trautchen to help me pick up the shavings because I can always make use of things like that, and I almost cried because once we had had Christmas in this empty room. But then I suddenly noticed that the wallpaper was a light gold, and where the pictures used to hang the paper was darker. Then I thought, now I'll make some new pictures because I can do magic with my transfers. And we would never again have had the chance of doing the whole lot of transfers one after the other on such lovely smooth paper. I told Trautchen to go and get a wet sponge, and then I worked very hard for three hours. All the walls were absolutely covered with lovely pictures. We found a ladder and Trautchen held it steady for me. So then I magicked transfers onto the ceiling as well. I had never seen anything so lovely and Trautchen thought everything was wonderful too. I had a funny feeling though that grownups might not

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see how lovely it was the way we did, and that was why I asked Trautchen to swear an oath not to tell.

First of all, Trautchen swore the oath. And after that she ran straight away to her mother and told her I had spoiled all the walls.

There was quite a row, and because I rather wanted to do penance I gave the money that was left over to our teacher the next morning. She put her hand on my head and said very loudly, "Honesty is the best policy. Remain honest, my child. I am glad to see you have one good quality at least." I was tempted then to tell her everything, but in the end I didn't. God understands everything, and Him you can tell everything to. But it is not a good idea to tell everything to humans, because it is very difficult to explain to them why you have done something or other that they think is wicked. I am very glad that God looks into my heart, since people can't.

Nobody understood either that I had to take revenge on Trautchen, and that it happened so to speak by itself, and it really hadn't anything to do with me.

The greatest pride of Mrs. Meiser was always Trautchen's fair hair. She used to damp it every evening for ten minutes, and set it in curls, and the next day Trautchen's head always looked like an enormous mop. Even Aunt Milly once said that Mrs. Meiser lacked all feeling for the beauty of simplicity.

I could have cut off Trautchen's hair, but such an

### *The Instrument of God*

idea never occurred to me, and even the other thing was not really my idea. It happened by itself. I was just an instrument.

In the evening, just before seven o'clock, my mother asked me to go quickly and get some bluing, because it was washday tomorrow. When I came back with the bag, quite properly and quietly, I saw Trautchen Meiser and Minchen Lenz playing hopscotch outside our new apartment. I walked past them quite quietly and just rubbed off the chalk marks a bit and pulled Trautchen's mop a little, that's all. But Trautchen immediately started yelling and shrieking and tried to run away. I just managed to grab her by her sash, and then something came over me and I emptied all the bluing over her head. I didn't do anything else at all. I didn't even stop Trautchen from running to the nearest faucet. Then I got some more bluing with the change I had left, and told my mother bluing had gone up.

We were just sitting down quite comfortably to supper when suddenly Mrs. Meiser rushed into the room, crying and shaking like a blancmange does when my father bangs his fist on the table sometimes. She was dragging Trautchen behind her. I didn't recognize her at all at first, because Trautchen had turned quite blue from putting her head under the faucet. Blue hair, blue face, blue frock. Quite blue. It was wonderful. I must dye myself blue like that one of these days. I would never have dreamed Trautchen could look so nice.

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Instead of seeing this and being pleased about it, Mrs. Meiser kept screaming that I had ruined her child and that she demanded compensation. So then I flew into a temper, because I have to endure torture after torture from this Meiser family. My mother and my Aunt Milly moaned as if they had suddenly got appendicitis, and my father looked at me with hatred, which a father ought not to do to his own child. I thought how my father was already having to pay for the wallpaper, and when Mrs. Meiser went on screaming about damages and how such a crime could never be paid for, I just said nicely and quietly I could easily pay for such a child as Trautchen; why, I had enough money in my bank to buy three children like that. Then there was such a terrible row that I just don't want to think about it any more.

Later that evening Mr. Kleinerz came round, and I could hear in my room how he was laughing and how he told my father that he had blued everything himself more than once and it wasn't really such a crime.

But all the other grownups are absolutely merciless. I'm not allowed to have any pudding after lunch, and they've confiscated my roller skates. Mrs. Meiser has fixed things so that none of the children in our street can play with me and at home they keep saying that I am heaping shame upon shame on the family. They don't even let me play in the street any more. Every afternoon my mother and Aunt Milly take me for a

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walk in the forest and keep hold of my hand. And they said that if I ran away from them I would be taken to a home for difficult children or to the Convent of the Good Shepherd. They'd probably refuse to take me, but if they did they would certainly be able to cope with me, of that I might be quite sure.

I cry the whole time and I wish I was dead, for what is left now in life for me? I have to wear the straightener, too, the whole time. I even have to wear a hat.

Sometimes I think that my mother and Aunt Milly will get bored with having to keep hold of me all the time. They can't tell each other anything that isn't suitable for children's ears. "People even say he beats her," they whispered once, but that didn't help them. I understood perfectly well, and I am also perfectly aware that they were talking about the Lebrechts across the road. Mr. Lebrecht is always going to the bar and drinking gin, and afterward he smashes up the chairs because their apartment is too small and because his wife wants to kill his rabbits and eat them, and he wants to stroke the rabbits and keep them. And his wife didn't look after the chickens properly either. One of them swallowed a darning needle and died of it. So it is very wrong of them to stick me in a chair at home and show me for hours on end how to darn stockings. All that happens is that chickens die from it, and suppose we want to have some later on? I know much more about

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the Lebrechts than my mother and Aunt Milly, but I wouldn't dream of discussing it with them.

Aunt Milly even said, "The child is fading away before our very eyes."

When I am allowed to go wherever I like again, I've thought of a wonderful new game. I shall stick gold paper over my straightener, and I shall wear it over my frock like a knight in armor. And then Hans and Otto and Mathias and I will play Saint George. I shall be Saint George.

## 4

*We Have a New Baby*

I want to die. We have a new baby. They try to tell me the stork brought it, but I don't believe that, of course, although after all the baby must have come from somewhere. Perhaps the grownups don't know themselves exactly.

Everything feels dark and cold. We are having a hot summer, but I am having a horrible winter without any snow. Nobody loves me, and nobody stops me from doing things. They let me do anything I want.

My mother is ill. She had the flu once, when I was younger, and I sat by her bed and showed her all the pictures in my picture book and told her stories about the amber fairy, and about horses that galloped upstairs and downstairs and gazed out of the windows. I was allowed to love my mother, and she loved me. When she lies in bed and wears that long white nightgown with the lace on it, my mother is my Child Jesus.

But now she has a new baby and kisses it all the time, and I am not allowed to read to her at all. Aunt Milly says it's because my mother is too ill and weak. But I

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know perfectly well that they don't want me there because they have a new child now. They always did say that they wished they had a better child. Oh, if only I had been good. But I never thought that such a terrible punishment would be visited on me.

I am so sad, it's as if I was dead. When it got late, I ran to the cemetery. It was full of silence and uneasiness. The air was like a warm, misty veil.

I wanted to see my grandmother's grave, because my granny loved me when she died, and now she is dead and buried and goes on loving me. Mr. Kleinerz next door told me only the dead can be depended on.

I was not afraid in the cemetery, not a bit afraid, or only a little bit afraid anyway. All the people there are dead, and they have received the last unction, and are good and without sin. Really wicked people have to live forever and don't get buried.

I couldn't find my granny's grave anywhere. So I sat down on another grave. It had a stone that looked as tall and stern as the school inspector who came to school once and is coming again tomorrow; everybody is terrified, even the teachers, thank goodness.

I don't want to cry. The grownups laugh when I cry. And when I laugh, they don't like that either because it generally means I've done something they don't like. I am supposed to understand the seriousness of life. What is the seriousness of life?

Now I am surrounded by dead people. Dead people

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don't laugh any more. They rattle their bones. That is the way dead people laugh.

The strange grave is white, with engraved letters. My head is too sad, I can't lift it. But my fingers have eyes. I can read the engraved gold letters with my fingers, slowly. That is the way blind people live.

"Here rests in peace . . ." My grandmother made me a wreath of tiny roses out of her dance frock of stiff white silk. I wear it in her memory when I am an angel in the school Christmas play. I even have wings then. Of course, I am not as good as an angel, but I am the best at saying poetry.

Dead people all know each other, and when living people want to give a message, they pass it on if you want them to.

There is an excited wind around me, and torn clouds pass above my head, and huge leafy trees are growing above me. Near me there are some white carnations. I can touch them, I am not afraid. We have some like them on our balcony. My mother waters them every morning—not today though, because she is in the hospital. We like pansies best of all, with their sweet velvet faces like little Japanese children or Pekinese dogs.

My father shouted, "Thank God, a boy at last!" I wanted to know how all this happened so suddenly. Aunt Milly also always wants to know everything. She always says, after all she is one of the family, and after all, so am I. But now I am not, any more.

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When my father's club telephoned, my father breathed loudly into the telephone. "Yes, a boy, yes, yes, a boy!" His voice was quite hoarse. I thought the telephone would catch fire from his voice and burst into flames. And he said he had always wanted a boy. Why did they get me then, when I am a girl, if it was a boy they wanted? Perhaps they buy the children from an orphanage and girls are cheaper, and my father only bought me because he wasn't earning enough then to pay for a boy. After all, they have bought a new sideboard too, and given the old one away without a qualm to a horribly fat widow in Horrem, because if she had the sideboard she could get married more easily to some postman, and she used to help my mother with the monthly wash.

I once heard my mother say to Aunt Milly, a man never really tells the whole truth about his business affairs.

Anyway I don't see why they want a boy. I know some boys, like Hubert Bulle for instance, who tears the wings off pretty little butterflies, and who can't pull himself up on the horizontal bars, and screams with fright and falls into the moat in the park whenever I give him the tiniest push. I can't see how a boy like that is worth more than a girl. It's all a complete mystery, but I mean to get to the bottom of it.

Girls are female. I know from nature study that animals are always female when they produce something

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important. When they are female, they can have young and give milk and lay eggs. Cocks are male, and they can only look very bright and say cockadoodledoo, and pull the feathers off the hens in their nasty way. Really, everything is arranged much better with animals. If I could lay eggs, they would go mad about me. I could feed the whole family. Before I went to school I would quickly lay a few eggs and sell them in the market so that I could have some money of my own. After all, they would be my eggs and I am quite entitled to do what I like with them. But most of them I would let them have at home. Animals have fur coats too, and they don't feel the cold or have to wear clothes. They don't have to be careful—the fur never wears out or needs to be carefully darned. They can even have spots on their fur. I would love to have some beautiful white woolen furs for my mother, like the Polar bears in the zoo. My father could have a darker fur like a buffalo. He doesn't like wearing flashy things. And Aunt Milly could have green parrot feathers all over, and puff herself up—she always likes to feel fresh and dainty. That beastly old Mrs. Meiser would get a mangy old monkey skin so that she would never dare get up from her chair any more.

Of course there are nicer boys than Hubert Bulle. And it may be my father wanted to have a specially nice boy, because he thinks a girl like me is so bad she

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only brings shame on the family, and he is forever having to put his hand in his pocket.

The day before yesterday he had to put his hand in his pocket for a new white collar for that pimply Miss Lowenich in our street. Just because I squeezed some ink down her neck with an old fountain-pen filler. Well, I had to, because Low-as-low Lowenich is always coming to my mother and saying, "My dear, you are not bringing the child up properly. If we locked the little madcap in a dark room for a few hours each day, the darling would very soon be modest and good." First she says things like that, and then she is surprised if I get in a rage with her. No child loves people who want to lock her in a dark room for hours on end. And she says I should have a spanking. And then she says, "Come to me," and wants to kiss me with her wrinkled, crumpled mouth. Hans says this was about the lowest thing he ever heard, and he certainly knows something about life. I asked Mr. Kleinerz too, one evening when he came to drink punch with us, if he would like to be kissed by Miss Lowenich. Mr. Kleinerz said the woman absolutely repelled him physically and would give him the creeps. And he said to my mother, "You, dear lady, are quite helpless before such a devilishly dried-up creature."

I asked what he meant, so they sent me to bed. They always do that when I want to know something in the evening. And when I ask something in the morning,

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they say it is high time for me to go to school. And when I ask something after lunch, I have to do my homework first. In the afternoon I can't ask because then I go and play with my friends in the street or in the woods, because after all a child has to have some free time. And then when I have time to ask again, I have to go to bed. Nobody ever answers children. Nobody ever.

Because Old Low-as-low Lowenich is always torturing me and my mother, I went to the Golden Corner that afternoon. There are a lot of stalls and swings and merry-go-rounds there. Shooting booths as well. I often think, that's what it's like in Heaven. But in Heaven I won't need money. In Heaven I can ride on the merry-go-rounds as much as I want, and go to every booth and stall there is. Now, while I am still alive, I can't go anywhere; but everything is wonderful just the same, even from the outside. There is one booth where a man saws a woman in half. Hans wouldn't believe at first that he was allowed to, but it is perfectly true. I have discussed it with the man. He has a huge blue anchor on his arm, which never comes off, and he let me see it quite close without paying. I am going to have little sailing boats and squirrels put on my arm some day. When you have money you can afford things like that. I will say I want it for Christmas. Perhaps I could exchange my coral necklace for it.

I told the man I would give him my new atlas and my real silver ring that Uncle Halmdach gave me if he

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would come to our street that night and saw Miss Lowenich in half.

Everything was completely settled, and then the man didn't turn up. It is because he is a real artist in his profession—he said he was himself. And Mr. Kleinerz once said that you can never rely on artists. So that made me think I would rather not be an artist myself. But even if I can't saw women in half, I would like to do something. Our teacher is always saying that whatever you are capable of doing, you should do with all your might. And so I splashed ink down Miss Lowenich's neck from the wall. She screamed at the top of her voice. And that evening my father shouted at me, "Child, child, can't you behave even now! Can't you show some consideration even now!" My mother said, "But my dear, my dear, the child doesn't know anything about it." So they knew then about the new baby and my mother didn't want to tell me.

Oh, if only I were as beautiful as a fairy, with a heart of gold, and golden hair as long as our street. A thousand pages would carry my golden hair behind me. Aunt Milly would never be allowed to rub smelly oil into my head at nights any more, and a Prince would appear and say, "This golden hair must never again be combed." Then they wouldn't tug my hair any more before school. They would think me beautiful and love me. Or I would be a fearless sailor leaning proudly against the mast, and everyone would cry bitterly as I

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left the harbor with my head held high. Oh, dear Granny . . . At midnight the dead come out of their graves and dance.

I decided I would pick all the flowers. Then they would let me into the hospital to see my mother. Mr. Kleinerz told my father he was going to visit my mother, and he was going to look for the loveliest flowers he could find to take with him. My father said, "Oh, but really, that is not necessary," and then Mr. Kleinerz said in a very firm voice, "Most certainly it is necessary." I want to see my mother.

I was very tired and it was a long way to the hospital. Once I asked a man the way. He said, "Next turn to the left." I thought that a grown-up man would never tell a child the truth, so I turned right. Everybody tells lies, and knows nothing. Even Mr. Kleinerz didn't know why we have a new baby. I kept taking wrong turnings, but in the end I did get to my mother. They let me into the hospital because I had such a lot of flowers.

"Come here, my little girl," my mother said, in a voice like a soft cushion. She was lying in a strange bed, and her face was white and joyous like snow. At the dark end of the bed my father was sitting. "You naughty child," he said. "What have you done now? Where did you get those flowers?" Then I wanted to cry, and I wanted to trample all the flowers on the floor. I know quite well how it is when I can't bear myself any more. Clouds come up inside me and wrap them-

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selves round me till I can't see anything and I just go crazy. I couldn't even answer. There was a funny smell in the room. The floor was covered with cold linoleum. And then my mother said, just in time, "Leave me alone with the child for a moment, dear. We women want to be on our own." And there was a glow on her face that blew my father right away.

I told my mother everything. A nurse had to come and it took three vases for all my grandmother's flowers. But at night the flowers are put outside the door, because otherwise all night long they whisper to my mother what is happening to the dead, and then my mother can't sleep. And she needs to sleep. In the morning they bring her the flowers again, straight away.

My mother said she would always love me. It wasn't that she wanted a better child either, but now that a little brother had come for me, I should be nice to him. Well, she didn't have to get him for me.

The bells of St. Mary's struck eight. Aunt Milly brought in the new baby. They promised me it would grow bigger soon and look nicer too. They say I was like that once, but I can't remember now. I will show him how to catch tadpoles when he begins to talk.

"You won't be allowed to sleep here," my mother said. And Aunt Milly had to take me home. But it is a completely different place when my mother isn't there. I would much rather have stayed in the hospital.

At home they suddenly woke me up. And my father

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said, "Are you pleased to have a little brother? Tell me, what would you like to do most of all? Shall I read to you from the *Animal Welfare Annual*? Or shall I look at the globe with you?" So I said at once, "I would like most of all to make water bombs and play with them."

Hans Lachs learned about water bombs from a clever, big boy at his school, and I had been thinking in bed that I'd like to do that tomorrow when no one was at home.

My father gave a big sigh, and wanted to read to me from the *Animal Welfare Annual* instead. I know nearly all the stories. At the beginning the human beings are always bad and wicked, and then they become noble and better-behaved because of some pathetic animal. I would much sooner they stayed wicked, and then the pathetic animals would bite off their heads.

I said I would still much rather make water bombs. I was very excited and I explained it to him. You fold the paper very cleverly to make the bomb, and you fill it with water, and you throw it out of the window into the street, and it goes off bang. Of course, it's best if it hits someone on the head. It can't *break* anyone's head. It can't hurt.

But my father said in a serious voice that he would make water bombs with me, only we were not to throw them on people's heads. Just on the pavement.

We had enormous heaps of paper and three buckets full of water. My father tried for a long time, and in the

### *The Bad Example*

end he could make them better than me. I love my father. I shall tell my mother tomorrow.

And all the time, we kept exploding bombs on the pavement. It was wonderful. I said to my father, we needn't drop the bombs right on people's heads, but we could just drop the bombs in front of them so that they would be rather surprised and wouldn't know what was going on. My father said, all right, we could do that, but that was to be the absolute limit.

Everything smelled of limes. You felt you could touch the air. Underneath, Old Low-as-low Lowenich came by with a man. I said to my father, "Just look!" And then I said, "Wait for it! Ready, steady, GO!" And then, instead of dropping the water bomb in front of Miss Lowenich's nose, my father threw it right at her green hat with the bobbing feather—the hat that tells you it's Miss Lowenich miles away.

Of course she screamed. I ducked down at once. And I did my best to pull my father's head down too—he hasn't had much practice yet at that sort of thing. Mr. Kleinerz told me, as one gets older so one gets more stupid. And then my father said, "The damned old goat! Child, you know I said you were *not* to throw water bombs at people's heads!" And I was still holding my water bomb!

I said I would be only too pleased if Miss Lowenich had been hit. My father laughed then, even though anyone in the street could see him as clearly as anything,

### *We Have a New Baby*

and he said, "All right. I am pleased too. But now, that's enough for today."

He carried me to bed. I fell asleep before I got there. He said to me, "Do you love your baby brother?" I was so tired I could scarcely say a word. I just said I had talked it all over with my mother, and after all, the child was here now anyway. . . . Perhaps I might love him later on. Perhaps I might lend him one of my roller skates as soon as he can walk. But for the time being, there's not very much I can do with a child as small as that.

## 5

*We Send a Letter to the Kaiser*

We've no time for playing now, Hans and me. We are going to do something very important, something that will make the grownups sit up. It is much more difficult for us now though, because of all this trouble with the new building.

Everyone is saying we flooded the new building, the Schweinwald children and Hans and Otto and me. But it would never have happened if the grownups hadn't interfered again.

We always used to go around to the new building after the bricklayers had gone, because it was much more fun than a whole house. We weren't supposed to, because we are never supposed to do anything really nice. We used to have fire practices there, because there is always a chance we might become firemen one day. It is a very noble profession. Everyone has to get out of your way. We shall tear through the street, and be heroes. Perhaps one day the war will be over, and Mr. Kleinerz says a lot of things will be different then; it is not wise to make plans. But there will always be a fire

### *We Send a Letter to the Kaiser*

department, that everyone respects, and that gets medals. And people say there'll always be fires, even when there isn't a war. Fires are wonderful. And putting them out is fun too.

We generally used to make the smallest of the Schweinwald children sit downstairs in the new building, so that we could rescue them at peril of our lives. Hans and I were the captains, and we climbed all over the highest planks and clambered up and down ropes, and shouted out, "Come on, my faithful comrades! Old women and children first!"

Kate Schweinwald was a very old lady and she had to be wrapped up in the horse blanket that was left behind when we had soldiers billeted with us. We couldn't give the blanket back, because the soldiers had left for the front already, and we don't get wool nowadays. The blanket is really military property, and my father is not to know about it, and really I'm not supposed to play with it because my mother wants to have it dyed blue so that she can make a coat out of it. But I need the blanket for saving the old lady. We had to have a blanket to jump into too. Otto's bedspread was the largest thing we'd got. Funny—perfectly ordinary quicklime made a big hole in it. Quicklime is just like fire. We had no idea.

We used to have copper pans at home, but they made cannons out of them. So Hans and I had to wear ordinary gray enamel pans for our helmets.

### *The Bad Example*

It was lovely when they put proper water faucets in the new building. Then we could really put fires out. Alois Schweinwald can't bear cold water and he used to scream just as if there was a real fire. It was wonderful. And everything would have been perfectly all right if some men hadn't suddenly shouted from outside, "What are you doing there? Come out of there!" Hans lost his helmet fleeing madly, and my mother needed it to boil vegetables in next day. And Kate Schweinwald and I fell in some wet mud. We got really stuck. We were in dire peril. But we all escaped in the end, the old people and the children as well.

The next day, some men came to see our parents, because we were known as the pests of the neighborhood and the new building had got flooded with water. We had left the faucets running when we fled for our lives. Otto thought I had turned them off. I thought Hans had turned them off. Hans thought Otto had turned them off. The Schweinwald children had not thought about it at all.

It was a Sunday. We had to go to church and we all had a spanking. And Professor Lachs read us something from the newspaper about a good dutiful boy who brought nothing but joy to his parents. This boy wrote a letter to the Kaiser about duty and industry. His Majesty was very pleased and he sent the boy a pony. A real live pony, imagine! Professor Lachs is always

### *We Send a Letter to the Kaiser*

saying that the newspaper is an excellent educational influence.

That Sunday afternoon our parents went out for tea in desperation. They went through the woods to the Linderthal, and had tea out, and for a punishment we were not allowed to go with them. I didn't care. I was glad, because I hate going out with grownups and having to walk with them. All life presses down on me then, just as if I was wearing a thousand straighteners. If there is another child there too, they say, "Come on now, take each other's hand and walk in front." Well, I have dozens of friends, and never once would we dream of taking each other's hand when we are out on our own, or when we go to the woods, or wherever we go! And when I have to walk in front of my parents and Aunt Milly, I only make them miserable. They are forever pulling at my clothes, and I am never nice enough for them. And then they make you sit for hours on end in a boring restaurant, and they don't even let you drink your lemonade in peace. They make me take very tiny sips because that is the polite way to drink, and it will stop me getting a chill on my tummy. If I don't they're immediately at me for gulping. And then they suddenly notice, sitting in the corner, a completely strange child, with completely strange people, and they say, "Go on then, tell her your name. Don't be awkward. Well, I don't know!" Everybody is staring, and they expect me to go and talk to this girl I've never

### *The Bad Example*

seen before in my life. Well, I don't want to. You can only do that sort of thing when you feel like it yourself. After all, even grownups don't speak to strange ladies in restaurants—even my father wouldn't do such a thing, and he's no coward.

So I was very glad that I didn't have to go with them that Sunday afternoon. We were supposed to think about our wickedness and stay at home. Aunt Milly wasn't very keen on me staying at home by myself, because she thought I would do something I shouldn't. I think it's very mean of her never to trust me.

As a matter of fact, I really did think about my wickedness, only I did so terribly want to see all the water in the new building, and then the Schweinwald children started whistling outside. Their father is a night watchman, and he sleeps nearly all day long. That's why nothing is ever done to them. I called out of the window that I had been forbidden to go downstairs. And Hans waved his swimming trunks and shouted that they were going swimming in the new building.

So I had to go too. Actually you can't swim in the new building, but you can bathe and dive and play U-boats. We got rather dirty and they couldn't get us properly clean again for days. We had the strictest instructions that we were not to play together for a very long time, because we had such a terrible influence on each other. But that is simply not true.

Hans and I are going to write to the Kaiser now to

### *We Send a Letter to the Kaiser*

fix everything and straighten it all out. That's why we are having to meet at the old fortress in the afternoons without anyone knowing. I have to tell them at home that I'm going to Alma Kubus's house to do my homework. And Hans has joined a children's club that Father Schlauff is running for singing hymns and being uplifted. But he doesn't actually go to it.

First of all we are going to write a sample letter to the Kaiser. We won't tell anyone anything about it. If we get an answer from the Kaiser later on, or a telegram perhaps, the people at school are sure not to believe it at first; but afterward they will bow down before us in wonder. Then they will realize that we are just as good and obedient as the boy who got the pony. Even better. And they will be proud to have us.

Hans and I won't write a joint letter. We are each going to write our own. It would be too terrible if we got just one telegram or one letter between the two of us. Perhaps the answer might come to Hans and then he might say it was his. Or else we would have to tear it down the middle, and if the Kaiser signed himself "Yours Wilhelm," then one of us would get "Wil" and the other would get "elm," and we would have to toss up for the "h" in the middle. Neither of us would get anything really good out of it. I want to have something just for myself, and Hans wants to have something just for himself, and we don't want to quarrel about it. We are going to explain all this to the Kaiser in our letters.

### *The Bad Example*

And I shall tell the Kaiser that I have been talking to lots of clever grownups and they all think that peace would be much nicer than the war, and that really the war has gone on quite long enough, and it is useless. I'll say I am sure that being an emperor he would like to know this sort of thing, but naturally he has to stay in his castle and govern, whereas I can walk about and listen to what the people are saying. And the best thing for him to do would be to abdicate. I don't quite know what that is, but an emperor knows everything and always has to study more than ordinary people. And I shall write that in school we sing wonderful songs about him all the time, as loudly as we can. And I am so sorry he has to wear such a heavy crown. I don't know how he can move in it. I don't even like wearing a sailor hat. And I shall tell him about the picture in the school hall, that has "I gave gold for iron" written on it. In the picture women are sacrificing their wedding rings and their long hair on the altar of the Fatherland. My mother wants to keep her wedding ring, whatever happens, but I would be glad to have my hair cut short. It's only a nuisance to me. The Kaiser could have it with pleasure, but there isn't very much of it, and anyway what does he want it for? If he has a lot of hair, it will only get into his dinner.

Aunt Milly pins thick switches onto her hair. There are heaps and heaps of them on her dressing table. I could take them secretly and send them to the Kaiser.

### *We Send a Letter to the Kaiser*

They are always telling us in school that the German genius for invention can find a use for everything. And I shall say that we ought to have a day off from school much more often. Not just Sunday, but Monday and Tuesday, and perhaps Wednesday too. And we shall also tell him about the agony we go through with some of our teachers. I want the Kaiser to order the instant dismissal of that beast Miss Knoll, because an emperor is just. He is the protector of the weak on earth.

Oh, perhaps soon my mother will be happy. She so much wants the war to end. It has lasted nearly four years already and it still goes on. My mother cries. All her brothers have been shot dead in the war. I never saw them, but I knitted mittens and scarves for them. I was always dropping stitches.

When there isn't a war any more, you won't have to queue in front of the municipal shop for ages and ages for bad jam. I quite like it all the same. Sometimes I have to wait for hours. Once Mrs. Schweinwald fainted right in front of me. I've been practicing fainting on my own, at home, and soon I'll be able to manage it. It's only a matter of being careful where your head falls.

When we had peace, my father once went to America, in a boat as big as our street, and as high as the cathedral. In America he could eat all the time, as much as he wanted the whole day long. He sometimes tells us about it in the evenings. There was fancy cake, and no saccharine, real sugar. And bananas and oranges,

### *The Bad Example*

and pieces of bread as big as the boat, with lots of butter. And cake and honey, as much as you wanted. Once he even brought me a pair of real Red Indian shoes from America. Moccasins they are called. And I wasn't even properly born then. But I still have the shoes. I can't wear them, but I keep them on my shelf as an ornament. My mother has some little shoes on her sideboard that used to be mine when I was a baby. She had them specially made into an ornament, so that they went hard and green. I don't know how they do that. I don't know either why I don't remember all these things that happened when I was so little. Maybe they are just telling lies.

Now I am wearing wooden sandals. I get on the nerves of everyone in the house with them. They are loudest of all when I go downstairs, because the stairs are made of hollow wood and there isn't a stair carpet there any more like there used to be. And then I pretend that I am a resounding trumpet and Red Indian Negro war drums. I love listening to myself.

Once we had honey, real bees' honey. That was when we went to Dimmelskirchen. They had to take me along as well, to help carry the things, and I didn't have to love nature or behave the way I have to on an excursion. One hour from Dimmelskirchen there was a farmer my father knew through business. He didn't want to give us anything because he thinks the townspeople are a nuisance and he doesn't like people who

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don't get enough to eat. But my father took him some kerosene, so he let us have some eggs. We had to hide them. My mother put them inside her blouse, so we had to be careful no one touched her or pushed her. And I had to hide some pots of honey in my sailor blouse. They wouldn't let us sleep at the farm, so we had to walk a long way. It was very late and dark when we arrived at Dimmelskirchen. We tried to find a bed, because I couldn't walk any more. But there wasn't a room. There was only one inn, and there were no vacancies. I would have loved to have seen a stable again, smelling of warm, dappled skin, where cows are slowly rattling their chains.

My father went from house to house, but he couldn't find a room to sleep in. There was no moon, and no light in the street. I fell down three times, but the jars didn't break. I just hurt my knee. The farmer might have let us stay in his kitchen but we couldn't get back there in the dark, and we couldn't get a train because there is no station in Dimmelskirchen; the nearest one is an hour's walk. You could never find your way there in the middle of the night; the path runs through a wood, with roots and steep slopes that you would fall over.

At last we were allowed to stay in a convent hospital. But even they didn't want us either, at first. We sat in a huge empty hall, very close to each other because it was so cold. We ate a whole jar of honey with my

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father's pocketknife, taking turns. I like eating with a knife, but generally I'm not allowed to. My mother said real honey would give us warmth and strength.

The next day, at five o'clock in the morning, we saw men and girls going to the station, to catch a train to the factory. Those with green and yellow faces and hair work in munitions. They get like that there. I know a lot of them.

They were all carrying lamps that flickered in a tiny, tired way. We walked behind them. Nobody spoke. Perhaps they were all afraid of the dark wood, and of robbers who lived in it. A very tiny old woman, like a dwarf, kept stumbling under her rucksack, which was much too big for her back. My father wanted to carry it for her, but she only growled like a dog growls, and ran away in a fright, quickly.

There was a light on the platform but it wasn't very bright. We were waiting for the train, and we were frozen. I couldn't open my eyes properly. Everyone was standing in such a bent, sad way. The railway lines glittered black. It started to rain slowly, but that didn't matter either. A policeman came along. His buttons shone. All at once, the rain fell down heavily in panic, and the policeman spoke loudly, and took hold of the little woman's rucksack and shook it. Potatoes jumped out of it, and darted all over the stones like little brown mice, and an egg smashed, glimmering in the light. The woman shrank together like a cockroach that is

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afraid when you touch it. Everybody was numb and silent, and someone said, "After all, he is only doing his duty." And we looked on as if we were asleep, as if we were dreaming. I hated the policeman. I wouldn't want to do my duty. An old man next to me took his crooked wrinkled hand from his pocket, and stretched it downward into air . . . the potatoes were too far away. He put his hand back in his pocket, and it trembled.

The train came, and we got in. We stood packed tightly together. It was much warmer in the train. People are nice. It smelled awful. I felt sick. Then suddenly I realized I was sticky in a peculiar sort of way. I felt underneath my sailor blouse. The jar of honey was smashed. I stuck fast to everyone in that crush.

I wish the Kaiser would make peace. I will write to him about it. An emperor can do everything. That's why he's an emperor. Miss Knoll said he was God come down to earth, and Mr. Kleinerz said he had pots of money as well. Hans said imagine being like God and having a crown and pots of money. And what is ermine? He has ermine as well. Well, in that case, he should be able to make white bread grow on all the trees, and the Rhine turn suddenly into a river of jam, and everyone have four arms when they have one shot off, and all the dead soldiers come alive again. We are always reading about the noble game of war, and often

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we play it with the Schweinwald children and throw ourselves down on the floor as if we were dead. But we always get up again, and if my head gets hurt sometimes my father always says, "There now, you're going too far!"

Mr. Kleinerz has an arm that was shot off. He says there are worse things but I can't believe that. But when he was in the Convent of the Holy Trinity, we used to go to see him every day, my father and I. We took him greengages and all our red rambler roses and puzzles, and we took things to the other wounded men too. I told them hundreds of stories about wolves that have teeth as big as poplars, and they want to eat grass and sheep, and then suddenly the grass turns into thistles and hurts their stomach, and a very large sheep comes with a pair of scissors and cuts their stomachs open like in Little Red Riding Hood. And I told them what I see when I dive deep down in the sea and wander around coral islands, and sharks swim beside me and never bite me because I give them amber. And the wounded men told me things too, and we told each other things, and once one of them played on his mouth organ very softly and sang "Nut-brown Maiden." Often I used to visit the wounded by myself, without my father. But I wasn't an empress even so. The Empress puts her kind hand on a man's fevered brow, and then all the wounded are happy and want to die for happiness. That is something I can't do.

### *We Send a Letter to the Kaiser*

Mr. Kleinerz told me there is as much white bread as you want when it is peacetime. You just have to go into a shop and ask for it. When they were children, they always soaked white bread in milk and ate it like that. I would like to do that, because it couldn't make you ill. Dr. Bohnenschmidt is very old now and knows everything, and he said that the ulcers on my legs and feet were from the bread. Ever since then I'm scared to eat bread, and my mother doesn't give me any more because she had such a dreadful time with me. She keeps all the food that isn't dangerous, for me. She won't eat it herself.

Now I only have scars on my legs. They don't hurt. But before that, they had to press pus out of them, and there were real holes in my legs and feet and they poured iodine into them. Every night. It hurt terribly. When I got up in the morning, I was already scared of the evening. I cried so much once when the iodine was poured into the holes that the police came because the people opposite thought I was being ill-treated and told them.

Near Mengers' Restaurant, a stranger soldier is digging in the fields. He is a prisoner and belongs to the Germans. If there is nobody in the restaurant, Mrs. Mengers sometimes lets me play with the billiard balls on the table. Then I pretend that the balls are flowers that I am rolling over a wide green lawn. I am not allowed to push the balls with the long stick. I can only

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use my hand, so that I can't spoil anything. Once Mrs. Mengers asked me to take a cup of coffee to the prisoner in the fields. After all, he is a human being too.

At first I was frightened because the prisoner was an enemy. But he sat quietly on a stone, and he twined his fingers round the spade, and his eyes were tired and dead, his chin was gray, and there was nothing laughing about him, everything was sad. I stood with the cup of coffee in front of him. The sky was wide and blue, and the field was brown and went on and on. Not one bird flew in the sky. I was quite alone with the prisoner. His cap lay on the ground, his hair was like dead grass waving in the wind. He wanted to go home. I am sure he wanted to go home. He didn't say anything but I am sure he wanted to go home. He comes from another country after all. Other countries are a long way off. We don't learn about them in school yet, but my father has told me. Once he was in Rumania, and he brought back an embroidered blouse for my mother. Rumania, where is Rumania? And there is Africa too, and there are Negroes, black Negroes, and the sun is burning hot. They don't need to go on holidays to get burned black. They are like that right from the start, even darker than Miss Lowenich who specially went to Borkum so that her friends would say, "My goodness, you are as black as a Negro!" And my mother lies on the balcony sometimes, in the old deck chair, and it collapses and she has bruises all over her, and she is frozen stiff, and

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she cries and then she says to my father, "Goodness, Victor, how brown I've got in the March sun!"

If I could only speak to this foreign prisoner. I searched for foreign words. I know a few. "Simsalabim!" I said. "Open Sesame! Abdulla. Vodka. Oh la la mademoiselle. Free State Liberia. Thurn and Taxis." The last ones are from my stamp album. I couldn't think of any others for the moment. The prisoner looked at me and didn't say anything. But he stirred in a friendly way. And he drank his coffee in one long gulp and put his cap on. And he gave me a small crucifix made of ivory.

I thought I would play billiards again. The balls rolled in such a sad way. I looked out of the window. Far away, the prisoner was digging, without stopping. I wished he could go home. Oh God, I wouldn't like to be a prisoner. I would never want to be a prisoner and not be able to go home.

When there is peace, the prisoner can go home, and our soldiers can come home. Everyone can come home. My soldier can come home too. He is in France. I don't know him. I once made up a field parcel for a lonely soldier who had no parents. Our chaplain in school gave us the addresses of lonely soldiers. He wrote to me. I write to him every week. Once we had a small ham and we ate half of it, and they let me send the other half to my soldier. He drew wonderful pictures for me of tanks and mountains of wire traps and fields full of

### *The Bad Example*

barbed wire. I stuck them into an album, but I wouldn't really like to live in places like that.

Our letters to the Kaiser got very long. I wrote mine on pink paper and Hans wrote on blue. We didn't put any stamps on them because we thought we didn't need stamps to write to the Kaiser.

Everything turned out frightful again. We were waiting for our answers and we were so happy. We never thought for one moment that everything would turn out frightful again. But the high officials in Berlin intercepted our letters, and they didn't give them to the Kaiser—we are quite certain about that, Hans and me. What we can't understand is why they are so angry. Every day my father and Professor Lachs have to go to the police station because of these letters. They think our fathers knew about them. As if we can't keep our own secrets! Our fathers hate us more than ever. They already had trouble and worry enough, and now we have put them into a terribly dangerous position, so that they are having to dash about all over the place. The letters are being sent to school as well, so that we get punished there. My mother says she will die of the shame of it. Our fathers are trying to keep it all quiet. We didn't mean to do anything wrong. We wanted to help. Nobody will tell us what is so awful about it. All they keep saying is that we are so terrible they can't find words to describe us. Hans cried, and said that now he was beginning to believe himself that we had

### *We Send a Letter to the Kaiser*

done something terrible. So I said we would have to get some money and go to the Kaiser ourselves and tell him people are reading his letters. I am sure that is not allowed. I know, because once Aunt Milly tried to read a letter addressed to my mother. Hans stopped crying at once and said he would come too. We shall have to fight a bear, to get the money.

You see, the Platoni Circus has just set up their tent in the field in front of our wood. They come every year, and each year they are smaller. My father said it was so small and pathetic and hopeless. But really it is wonderful—with a counting goat, and a snake man, and a wrestling bear. Mr. Platoni is a clown and he spits water out of his mouth at another clown. I can do that myself. But then he wrestles with the bear and gets on top of him. And anyone in the audience who will dare to wrestle with the bear will get a lot of money.

We stood outside the circus. Otto, the older Schweinwald boys, and Hans and me. Nobody spoke. Hans and I tossed up with an old bottle top. I lost. Then everyone said, "You wouldn't dare." So I did it. I was stiff with fear, and I didn't know what I was doing, and I couldn't think, and I wasn't alive any more but I did it. I ran into the circus tent, past all the people, right up to the clown and the bear.

I tried to wrestle with the bear. The clown was standing beside us. I took the bear by the ears and tried to pull his head down. Then he looked at me with such

### *The Bad Example*

sad eyes and fell down. I hardly pushed him even. He was much weaker than I was. Afterward everyone in the circus said he was weak. He has to go hungry day after day and doesn't get any meat to eat—nothing. Hans wanted to ask for the money for the fight but they didn't give us any. It was mean of them, but it hadn't been a proper fight. And the bear could have eaten me up, but he didn't. I cried about the sad bear. Hans felt like crying about the injustice of it. The Schweinwald children gathered around us and they didn't cry. We stood in the field. Our feet were wet in the grass. It was late. We were in for a row again. Then a wounded soldier on leave, who had been at the circus, came by. He gave me a mark.

We were so pleased to have the mark, why should we go to the Kaiser now? If he doesn't know himself what's going on, he can't be worth much. Hans said that in any case he was much more interested in Mr. Zeppelin now. He really was somebody special, and he wanted to write to him instead.

We decided to buy some honey for the poor bear. We knew he would like it. And after that, we were going to go to the Golden Corner and ride on the swings, higher and higher, right up to the clouds. That is the most wonderful thing to do.

When we came home, they knew all about the bear already. My mother hugged me. Mr. Kleinerz was there too, and he said he was surprised, dammit, when he

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thought of Hans and me and the dangers we went through, that there were any children left in the world and that the human race hadn't disappeared long ago. "Please don't swear, Mr. Kleinerz, in front of these dreadful children," said Aunt Milly.

My father came with us when we took the bear his honey. But the bear was dead. He had nothing to eat. It is all because of the war. I wish we had peace. I wish the bear was alive. Oh how I want the bear to come alive again.

## 6

*When I Was a Germ Carrier*

This is the end of everything. I have walked nearly to the very end of town. On the way I sat down in an empty field where an Aaron's Rod is growing. But I didn't pick it, because usually it is only open right at the very top. The rest of it is full of buds that have withered or don't open any more once you pick it.

I am not even allowed to go to school any more. We have had lunch at home, but I don't know what the time is now. Everything is mixed up, and I have to stay on my own the whole time. No child, far or near, is allowed to play with me because I am a germ carrier. Before now children have been forbidden to play with me sometimes because I was naughty and badly behaved. But this time I haven't been naughty at all and I haven't done anything bad. It was just because my little brother caught scarlet fever. That made me a germ carrier.

When I had been naughty, it was my own fault that no one was allowed to play with me. But then I used to whistle under their window and they came, just the

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same, and Hans went on building the cave with me and Mathias Ziskorns rolled stones over with me for hours on end to see what was underneath. Under stones everything is mysterious: squashed dead pale grasses that suddenly come to life again, and ants and excited earwigs that rush about and crowd together, and beetles that roll themselves up into hard little balls. We set free everything we find under the stones, and everything rushes about terrified because we have set it free. I am a little bit terrified myself, because it's so mysterious under these big stones. You can never tell what might happen when you turn one over. The freed grasses and the insects crowding together might suddenly scream, or speak, or look at me with wild eyes and leap at me.

I would never have thought I could be punished when I hadn't done anything wrong. Yet here I am being punished just because of the germs. I can't understand it at all. The world has become quite funny and changed, because I have to stay by myself all the time and always have time on my hands. Even Mr. Kleinerz has very little time for me. Grownups have their work to do, after all. How boring it is. He explained to me about carrying germs. Because my little brother has scarlet fever and lies in bed at home, he is infectious and anybody can catch scarlet fever from him. I might get scarlet fever myself in the end. But even if I haven't got it, I can infect other people. I don't know how. Perhaps germs are invisible ghosts and witches who glide about

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our flat and hang on to me, and persecute me wherever I go. And then when I meet someone they don't like perhaps they start biting them and making them ill. Ghosts can do anything just like moss dwarfs and bottle genie. They are generally invisible and silent, but sometimes they materialize and reveal themselves to human beings, and then you can have a wish. Perhaps there are good germs too, and perhaps one will suddenly reveal itself to me and give me three miniature poodles. The other day I saw three sweet miniature poodles in a front garden. I am sure they wanted to come with me but unfortunately they were locked up and I couldn't get the door open.

One day I suppose I could walk as far as that street where the pet shop is, with the dancing mice. There are parrots there too, and a thousand other littler birds, and little monkeys and veil fish, and tortoises like little flat roofs wandering about slowly. But perhaps even the animals can catch scarlet fever from me. Sometimes I get in a terrific rage with the germs, but I don't dare say anything out loud because I wouldn't want them to get angry.

At home they are always trying to get me out of the way, and I don't even like staying at home any more. My mother wears a white coverall and nurses my little brother and I am not allowed to go anywhere near her because I might get infected and because she is dead tired. Aunt Milly does the cooking and my

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father says it's pig food and he has to keep a tight hold on himself all the time. Aunt Milly cries and thinks everybody is wicked and ungrateful and she has to be comforted again, which is very hard work. In between, Dr. Bohnenschmidt keeps coming, and immediately everybody starts tearing about and his voice rumbles through the apartment and he says it is only a slight case, and there isn't the least danger any more. I hide so that he can't see me because he wants me as far away as possible and really he wants them to send me to stay with some other people. But I think this is a horrible idea, and so do the other people. I would love to live in a circus caravan, and I told them so too, but they didn't even answer. Then Dr. Bohnenschmidt washes his hands and everybody rushes to get clean towels and fusses about him and in the end—every time—he forgets his hat, and I have to run after him with it. Why isn't he a germ carrier? After all, he is in our apartment all the time, and actually with my brother. Only *I* have to be something so hateful and horrible.

When no one is looking I sometimes slip into my brother's room. He gets such a lot of raspberry juice he can't drink it all himself, and he doesn't like being alone, and he loves doing gym in bed when he isn't allowed to. I do shadow plays with him, and I tell him a very quick story about a prince who has his head bitten off by a horse, and when I looked out of the window the other night a devil ran across the street and

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suddenly an angel threw a star from the sky right on top of the devil who was killed instantly, and the next morning the dustmen picked him up quietly and threw him away, and the angels got their star back and fixed it on again, high in the sky. And I tell him how I flew in a Zeppelin as far as Africa where we kept bumping into giant giraffes.

I have to be terribly careful that no one sees me in my brother's room, and I have shown him how to throw his building bricks against the wall so that I know when he is on his own.

In the books I read sick children behave quite differently. They get a fever and then they say extraordinary things and toss about and the grownups around them weep and reform, and queens send them heaps of grapes and hardhearted barons become kind and give the poor family bundles of wood and don't take their last half-starved goat away from them after all, and the whole family thanks God for their wonderful salvation. But children of that sort lie in a hut with straw, right from the start.

When I have a temperature I just get cold compresses, and all they say is, "For heaven's sake, stop that yelling!"

I just don't know what to do. I could look for rusty nails, but I have so many of them already—a whole cartonful—and even so I am not a millionaire. We once had a story in school about a poor shivering boy in

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America who ran barefoot selling newspapers—in wind and snow. And he was industrious and ambitious and he found a rusty nail and that's how he became a millionaire. A millionaire is the richest thing in the world. Once I am a millionaire I can buy all the chestnut trees there are and spend the whole time feeding the deer at the zoo. I can buy the zoo as well, and go round all the cages with the keepers. I can even buy all the grownups who make me mad and put them on a boat and make them sail off to faraway seas where there's nowhere to land.

Perhaps I could go to the wood and look for toadstools and eat one and see what happens. And I know where there is some deadly nightshade growing.

Now everything is different again, I am so excited. I have a real grown-up soldier. I have three soldiers as a matter of fact. I meet them every day and have lemonade with them and eat iron rations. Iron rations are soldiers' biscuits; they are so hard that I have already broken one tooth but it doesn't matter. The soldiers are happy because I am a germ carrier. The only thing that worries them is that perhaps I might not be one after all. But I am. I'm sure I am.

They let me wear their soldiers' belts and drink out of their water bottle, and they have given me five buttons from their uniforms as well. They play cards with me, and they are making me the biggest kite in the whole world. And one of them comes from the country

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and he specially brought me back a sausage for the five of us at home.

It all happened because I was taking turnips from the freight station. It isn't really allowed. First of all I was going to pick some flowers in the park and take them to our headmistress, so as to infect her a bit with my germs. Then perhaps she would be away when they let me go back to school again. But in the end I went collecting turnips instead. Usually I go with some others so that a few of us can keep a watch out. But this time I had to go alone, of course. My mother makes boiled turnip-tops from the turnips. I shouldn't really get them from the freight station but when I bring them home my mother is very pleased. I just say that the turnips fell off a truck and I picked them up in the road. But it's much easier to get them when there are railroad cars full of them at the freight station. Sometimes there are a few on the ground, but mostly they are on top of the cars.

So I was climbing around one of the cars, being careful of my big sack, and looking behind me and all around, in case anyone might catch me. Suddenly someone behind me shouted, "For shame! What are you doing up there!" Of course I climbed right on top of the car as fast as I could and didn't dare come down. I just looked. Just underneath me was that beast Mrs. Meiser with her fat pink face and a huge brown velvet hat on her dusty hair. I only hope she didn't recognize

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me. Next to her stood a man, round and black. And they were talking. "You can see for yourself . . . decadent youth . . . but my Trautchen would never do anything like that . . . yes, it is the fault of the parents . . . a lost generation . . . what will become of them, Your Honor?"

I could see at once that they had bad intentions, and I squeezed myself down among the turnips, and then suddenly the train started. It went on and on. It was my salvation. I was happy. Riding in a train is so lovely. As soon as you start moving, the danger is past. You aren't waiting for something to happen any more. You aren't frightened then.

I quickly took a squashed turnip and threw it at Mrs. Meiser's velvet hat. I might also have hit the round man too. Unfortunately I couldn't see.

I was very careful not to fall off and not to be seen by anybody. It was wonderful. I thought how I would tell Hans all about it.

Then the train stopped. I couldn't go any further. I had to go home after all. If it wasn't for that, I wouldn't have been frightened a bit. But I was afraid about home. I quickly filled my sack with turnips and climbed down and pulled the sack down behind me. Suddenly someone put their arms around me and lifted me down from the bumpers. I got a terrific fright and when I was put down on the ground I screamed. I didn't want to go to prison. Prison is terrible. You get lice there. Our Elise

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knows all about it. Then my mother would be full of despair again and throw her arms up above her head. I have had lice once already. I got them from Christine Moosbachs whom I used to sit next to in class. She can pull the most wonderful faces. There are lots of them living together in one kitchen. They drink coffee straight out of the pot instead of out of cups, and she is a real illegitimate child. She told me so herself. That means she has no father. I sometimes wish I was an illegitimate child. I am often glad when my father is away traveling. Christine's mother is so nice and tiny like a little white mouse, and as light as a fairy. Unfortunately she couldn't pay Christine's school fees any more, and that's why Christine had to leave. Of course there was the lice as well. But I still go and play with her after school. We always come across such a lot of things together, and her mother is away at work nearly the whole day. She is chambermaid in a hotel. Christine is not a bit proud and stuck-up about being an illegitimate child. Other people are often terribly stuck-up and silly even when they aren't anything special at all.

Everything turned out all right because the man who lifted me down from the bumper was a soldier on leave. He laughed and took my hand and carried my sack of turnips for me, but he didn't try to take it away from me.

“What a b—— war,” he said. That's a word I'm not

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allowed to use at home. But with my soldier I can say it whenever I want to now.

I told the soldier everything—all about the turnips and beastly Mrs. Meiser and where I come from, and how I have to go home again, and how I didn't know where I was. I was in Frechen. That's a long way from home. The soldier thought about it, and we talked about it, and thought about it again.

And then the soldier went away and I had to wait. Suddenly a real car drew up and I was allowed to go home in the car with the soldier. I was so happy. And then I remembered that I was a germ carrier and maybe the nice soldier would catch scarlet fever, and I told him all about my little brother and how terribly infectious he is, and that I was infectious too. Then the soldier asked me all sorts of things and thought for a bit and then asked me a lot more questions. He suddenly straightened up and became much taller. His eyes were shining with tremendous interest. And then he slowly said that there was nothing in the world he would like better than to catch scarlet fever and perhaps God had sent me to him. He said that I was a big girl, a sensible girl, and that I shouldn't tell anyone anything about it.

He explained that it was 1918 already and the war would soon be over and he didn't want to get killed at the last minute or lose his legs, his arms, his eyes. His parents are old, and he has a fiancée in Westphalia, and they need him. If he gets scarlet fever, he won't be

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able to get killed any more. They will have to send him to an army hospital. It might even be near us, and then I could always visit him. And when he is well again, the war will be over. I always thought that soldiers wanted to sing songs and capture towering fortresses, and win Iron Crosses. That's what they tell us at school. But we don't believe what we're told at school any more, Hans and I. All the same, you are rather surprised when everything is always and always absolutely different from what they tell you at school.

First of all, the soldier took me back home with my sackful of turnips. It was rather late by then, but not terribly, thank goodness. The soldier told my mother I had found the turnips and that he had helped me carry them home. And that he was very sorry to hear there was illness in the family and that he would like to call again and ask how things were.

My mother was very pleased about the turnips, but they were a burden to her as well because it meant she had to cut them all up and she already had too much to do. "In the end, everything is always left to me; and yet we can hardly let them all go bad." When I am grown-up I shall arrange everything quite quite differently. I will have a thousand rooms and leave the electric light burning in all of them, day and night, and nobody will be allowed to tell me all the time "Go and turn off the light! You've left the light on again! Turn out the light in the hall!" When I am grown-up, all the lights will

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be on all the time. And I shall eat jam and liver sausage together in one sandwich, with butter on it as well. And I shall stand on the rooftop and just throw turnips in all directions, whenever anyone brings me some and I don't feel like using them. And never again will anyone dare to say to me "You know quite well we have to economize."

The soldier came again next day, and he brought a beer bottle full of milk for my little brother and sat in the sitting room and made himself useful and didn't want to go. And he kept saying he wanted to talk to my little brother too. My mother and Aunt Milly were so delighted with the soldier, and so touched, and kept talking about him, but they wouldn't let him see my little brother—not on any account, because of the infection. And Aunt Milly said, "Good Heavens, how can we abuse such selflessness! Under no circumstances can we think of endangering our brave defender of the Fatherland! We cannot be so irresponsible!"

Now I meet the soldier every day, and two of his friends come too. They all want to catch scarlet fever. Sometimes we wonder if I'll have enough germs for three big soldiers, and then we are all depressed and nobody knows what will happen.

Now I'm in a terrible jam because of Mrs. Meiser and the sheet and the masks.

This is how it happened. First of all one of my soldiers brought me the most beautiful thing in the world

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—a lot of lovely gruesome masks. Masks of animals and masks of human beings. The human ones are the most horrible ones—when you put them on everyone's blood runs cold. I put them on in front of the big mirror in my parents' bedroom. The masks have tiny holes just big enough for your eyes to look through. They weren't my eyes any more, in front of the mirror. It made me laugh and I danced about until I couldn't go on any more and I had to kneel in front of the mirror and beg myself not to do anything awful to myself, *please*. And I had on a wicked old man's face with a white beard and wicked red cheeks, as wicked as the wickedest giant, and this face looked at me and frightened me so much I simply couldn't move. I can't have been crying because the mirror didn't start crying. I wanted the mirror to take the beastly mask off, and I waited, and I longed for someone to come and be cross with me, and I hoped no one would ever come, no one at all. I threw myself flat on the floor, so flat that no mirror could get at me any more, and I pulled with all my might at the rubber band of the mask that was in my hair—and then there was the mask in my hand. But I wouldn't even look at myself in the mirror any more. I walked very quickly out of the room. Of course I was glad to have the masks. I liked putting them on and leaping about and frightening people with them, but I didn't want ever to put them on again when I was alone by myself.

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Then I took the sheet for my soldiers. The sheet was from my little brother. They said the most dangerous thing was the sheets, when the person with scarlet fever was peeling. And they always used to take the pillow-cases and sheets away and hurriedly put them into a little brown barrel in the garden. I secretly took a sheet out of it, and I meant to give it to the soldiers because it had more germs than me, and it would help them to get scarlet fever. I was afraid they mightn't have faith in me any more, and would stop believing I was really a germ carrier.

So in the evening I went off with the sheet under my arm to take it to the soldiers. But suddenly Hans came round the corner, and said he had been waiting for me and he was sick of school and he didn't care about scarlet fever; he had a new album with some lovely cards and we could make some swaps because he had two of some of them. Soldiers are wonderful and big and grown-up, and they are heroes, and I am proud when they play with me. But I did want to play with children again, just for once.

Hans told me about Mrs. Meiser. He said she had a little garden hose and she stands on the balcony and splashes all the children with it. And then he suddenly saw my sheet and he said that he thought that might come in very handy. I didn't tell him anything about the soldiers. I was also thinking the sheet would come in handy. I told him about my masks too, and Hans got

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very enthusiastic. I fetched the masks, and while I was getting them, Hans whistled for Otto and they brought some sheets too. Then we put our masks on and wound the sheets around us, and we crept through the garden to Mrs. Meiser's back balcony, and we began to call, "Hoo Hoo" and "Ho Ho" in a hollow terrifying voice. I pushed in front. I had a donkey's head on, and it kept slipping. I couldn't see a thing, but I howled very loudly, "HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO"! I howled louder and louder! Suddenly something pounced on me and grabbed at my sheet. I dashed away, and I turned around for one second—it's Mrs. Meiser! She's taken my sheet! What shall I do? I had to leave it—the others had disappeared ages ago. I came up with them again at the corner of the street. We were all still wearing our masks, Hans, Otto, and me. Hans said Mrs. Meiser can't possibly have recognized me.

I don't know how this will all end. I took a pillow-case from my brother's bed, and gave my soldiers that, the next day. They were terribly pleased with it, and said that if that didn't help them, nothing would. And then they began worrying that I might catch scarlet fever on account of them, and they said they didn't want that to happen and they couldn't take on such a responsibility. Then they went off with the pillowcase, and they will let me know when they get scarlet fever, and they will never forget me. When the war is over they will come and visit me. And they liked me better than

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General Ludendorff and the Empress. I love the soldiers, and I do want to help them—but I love my mother more, and children, whom I can play really properly with, I love best of all.

My little brother is quite better now. I have stayed perfectly all right myself so far, and everyone is amazed. But they don't really know anything at all about it. Dr. Bohnenschmidt says that his energetic countermeasures had probably helped. At home everyone is pleased with me because I have behaved so well and never bothered them during this very difficult time. They said I deserved a reward. They said that they would take me to Konigswinter and let me ride up the mountainside on a real donkey. They also said that now, thank goodness, they could pay some attention to me again. But they are still worried because there is a sheet missing that they can't account for; and a pillowcase has disappeared too. I don't say a word. That's always best.

Hans and I have made a plan to get the sheet back from Mrs. Meiser after she has washed it and bleached it. We'll get it then. Perhaps she will get scarlet fever, for a woman like that is just the kind to be bitten by germs.

Now I can come near my mother again—quite close. Perhaps I will tell her everything one day. But it might be better, I think, to wait till I have been up the mountainside on the donkey.

## 7

*I Am Often Afraid*

If you think that children never have anything to worry about, then you must be stupid. People are always saying, "Oh childhood is such a carefree time. You never have that time over again." But I am certain a child has far more worries than a grownup.

I am so terribly afraid, I can't tell anyone about it, not even my mother; she will only think I am silly. My father has a book with pictures in it of horrible old women, like witches. They crouch under the earth and they have long fingers. Everybody says there is no such thing as witches. I know there isn't. But I still dream at night that suddenly the earth opens under my feet and the witches grab my legs and pull me down. And then the earth closes over my head again.

I am not afraid in the mornings and I am not afraid when I am with other children. But when I am walking by myself in the evenings I always hold tight to the fences so that I have something to hang on to when the witches try to drag me down by the legs. Sometimes there isn't a fence or anything at all. It is terrible then.

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I run, run as fast as I can. And if the pavement is made of little square stones, then I mustn't walk on the lines, I have to keep right in the middle of each stone. And then there's a nasty song we have for one of our games—I hate it. "Is the black cook about, yes, yes, the first time I must walk about, the second time I must lose my head, the third time . . ." I don't like that song about black cook, but I don't let anyone know.

I always ask Elise or my mother to stay with me while I get undressed at night, but they say I am being a nuisance and I'm too big for that sort of thing. I can't tell them about it. When I get undressed I hold on to the bed with one hand, and then when I have to go to the bathroom I always walk so that there's something to clutch hold of—I have to make a jump in front of the bathroom door. I only use one hand for washing, so that I can hang on to the washbasin with the other.

Once it is dark in my room, witches' faces jump up everywhere. I can't go to sleep, my heart is beating so. I put my arms under the blanket—perhaps there's a witch man under my bed, and he'll chop off my arms with a chopper if I keep them outside.

I am frightened the whole time. And now if my mother has to go to school to see the headmistress because of the way I behaved it will be terrible. Whenever my mother has had to go to school, and then I come home for lunch, they all sit around with stiff, clenched faces, and look at me without speaking and

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shake their heads. My father is on edge because of his business worries, and he keeps drumming his fingers on the table, and soon he'll start shouting that all his life he has been honest, and my mother has been honest, and now his daughter has turned out lazy, untidy, naughty, disobedient, and well on the road to wickedness. The last time it was terrible, and every time it happens again it will always be more and more terrible.

Last Sunday, Hans gave me a little book. It was called *The Noble Man with the Bloodstained Head*. I had hidden it inside my composition book. My father found it and he was furious and he hit me on the head with it. It was a bad and a wicked book, and nobody should read books about blood, and I should go to church instead.

I was trembling, and I tried to explain. The man's bloodstained head is just from a wound, that's all. A brave servant is standing beside him, and hides him from the Saracens, and a Turkish lady covers him with her black waving tresses. They are scented, and everything turns out all right. My father gave me *Grimm's Fairy Tales* for Christmas. There are much worse things in that. There's a story about a witch swimming in her blood in bed one morning. And they put blood on the stairs, to make magic. And that book I was meant to read. My father wanted me to. I love reading fairy tales, but they frighten me. It isn't the blood that frightens me so, but in the story of the magic bird there is a horrible

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witch who says evilly and sarcastically to the children after they have run away and she has caught them again, "You little fools." And I am as frightened of these words as I am of a bat.

And in church it is worst of all, there is so much blood about. There you don't just read about it, you have to stare at it. All the saints have blood on them—it is terrible. Often I think about St. Sebastian and I feel all his arrows in my arms and sticking in me everywhere—I pray and pray and touch my arms, just longing for the arrows to go away. Sometimes I think I would like to be a martyr too; then I would save all humanity, and my parents would forgive me then, and cry.

Above my head, there is a large picture hanging. It is not a picture with blood in it; it is beautiful. And it is called "Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ sur la mer." Jesus is walking softly and lightly over a sheet of water, and he pulls Peter out and saves him from drowning. His dress is beautiful, like a blessing. Usually men's clothes are not a bit kind and friendly. If people walked about the earth in those soft garments, they would surely not be bad and wicked, but good and helpful like guardian angels; and they would all be so much more handsome. I can't really imagine my father and Mr. Kleinerz going to the office in clothes like that. Perhaps they wouldn't go to business then, but just wander through the fields in a quiet, dreamy way. Of course my father would never be cross with me then any more. I love my

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father and Mr. Kleinerz but they aren't really very beautiful. They haven't much hair left, and really they would need hair. Perhaps it would be better if they stayed the way they are.

I pray to Jesus every night to make everything right for me, and to move me up into another class, and to see they don't find out at home so that my mother doesn't have to see the headmistress. He has often helped me before, and I bring Him sacrifices too. You have to do that. One night I sat at the cold open window for a whole hour just in my nightdress, and I held my eyes open with my fingers so that they shouldn't fall asleep. My fingers got numb, and my feet too; my teeth were chattering, it was so cold. There were clouds in the sky with faces like witches, there was a breathing and a rustling in the room—and then a church bell rang out, ding dong, ding dong. That was the sign that I could go back to bed. I didn't mean to cheat Jesus—it wasn't really a whole hour that I sacrificed, only our chaplain said once that the Lord does not measure with an earthly measure.

Now I have to say prayers and make sacrifices because of this terrible business of the order mark book. If it comes out, all is lost. I just had to take it, and bury it in our garden; there was nothing else I could do.

This is how it all happened. If you behave badly, then your teacher gives you a black mark in her notebook. And if you behave badly lots of times, then she

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puts a black mark against you in the order mark book. If you are late, that goes in the order mark book too, and the same if you are away, and so on, and this book is kept in the teacher's desk. If there are three black marks against you in the order mark book, then they write to your parents, and your parents have to come to see them and they tell them all sorts of beastly things about you. I'd already had six black marks this term—more than anyone else—and my mother had had to go to see the head twice. I meant to be good after that, and then suddenly I got two black marks again, and I knew I would be sure to get a third one and another letter would come, and my mother would have to go to see the head again. They would take the strictest measures this time—it would be terrible. I do try dreadfully hard to be good, but then something happens again—oh, I just don't know how it happens.

Now I've got a third black mark because I whistled in the middle of a child's silent heroism. It just happened that Miss Knoll, our teacher, was ill, and we were supposed to have German, so Miss Plautz came instead. She is very small and thin with a big flat head like a doughnut when Elise has forgotten to put the baking powder in. She usually takes us for nature study. She wanted to give us a treat because she was taking somebody else's place, so she read us a wonderful story—"A Child's Silent Heroism." We like being read to, because then we don't have any questions to answer.

### *The Bad Example*

I was glad Miss Knoll was ill, because I hadn't finished my homework. It is difficult to lie to Miss Knoll. She has very sharp eyes and she bores right into your face with them, and once she even told me she could look right into my soul. I told her once, when we'd been given a poem to learn, that I knew it perfectly the evening before, but on the way to school a cyclist had run over me—just my head—and the shock had driven it completely out of my mind again; but she didn't believe me.

So I thought, I am saved, because beastly Old Knoll hasn't come after all, and Miss Plautz is going to read to us. I listened to it at first. It was about a boy dragging children out from under the ice. I would like to be a hero too and do things like that, but it is just my luck that children never fall under the ice when I am there. If I pushed them in first, I don't think it would count.

I meant to go on listening, but suddenly I felt very tired. Miss Plautz' voice was so boring—like rain, rain, rain. My eyes kept closing. I thought about Hans and about a new whistle we had made up to signal with. The grownups got to know our old whistle, so that wasn't any good any more. I couldn't remember the new whistle, and I thought and thought about it, and whistled in my mind—and suddenly I was whistling out loud. Miss Plautz closed her book with a bang. I was scared to death. Miss Plautz always thinks that

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we're trying to make a fool of her. She is always afraid of that, and it makes her furious.

She put down another black mark for me. I had to leave the room, and I wasn't allowed to listen to the story any more. But I didn't mind that. I locked myself into the lavatory so that no one could see me—especially our headmistress—and ask me questions, and where else can you think about things quietly? Nobody looks at the black marks in our order mark book, only Miss Knoll. She writes the letters too. If I took the order mark book away, Miss Knoll would never find out about my new black mark. So I took the book secretly out of the desk at lunchtime—nobody saw me—and I buried it in the farthest corner of the garden, near a dead buried thrush. I would have liked to dig up the dead thrush and see what had happened to it, but I didn't dare. Earth does frightening things sometimes.

There is terrific excitement about the the order mark book, worse than when we're having an air attack, or if there's a victory. They suspect me. Miss Knoll told me to look straight into her eyes. I did too. She said I should give her my hand. And I did. She told me to confess everything without fear. That I didn't do. No one would ever find out, if only I hadn't told Alma Kubus about it; but now I'm terribly scared. I once heard that Mr. Lebrecht who lives opposite shout at his wife, "Women can never keep their traps shut."

Alma Kubus is in my class. She is pale and good with

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thin brown plaits. She was put next to me because she is so good, and because she won't give way to my bad influence. Up till then, my friend Elli had sat next to me, and then the lessons were not half so boring and we had a lot of fun together. I was very upset when Elli was moved. She is far away, on another bench. Of course, I can still see her, but it isn't the same as before when I could whisper anything important to her every minute or so. Without Elli, my place has suddenly become quite strange and not homey any more. We knew the meaning of every ink spot on our desks, and all the scratches and the carved signs and initials. You can't explain all that to a stranger. We moved into a new apartment some time ago, but that was less upsetting and strange than the change in my class through having to sit next to another girl.

I didn't feel at ease, either, next to Alma Kubus. At first I worked out a sign language with Elli, but it was difficult to go on doing that for long because we were so far apart. Alma Kubus would not talk to me during lessons, and they are always so endless I simply can't bear it. That's why I had to get used to Alma, but she always keeps her face so stiff, like a modeling-wax one, just because our teacher said she trusted her completely and was sure she would not succumb to my bad influence. But I have already got so far that she plays Beggar My Neighbor with me in Scripture—with very

### *I Am Often Afraid*

tiny playing cards, only half as big as a matchbox. Uncle Halmdach gave them to me once.

Alma always does her homework. Sometimes she lets me copy it, but not often. I wanted her to like me and laugh with me like Elli does, but she won't. Sometimes she'll do what I want her to do, but she'd never dream of doing it without me.

Outside school, I would never think of being friends with Alma, only she has St. Vitus's dance. I haven't seen it yet, but it's perfectly true. She told me so, and her mother says so too. Hans says it is a dance of howling dervishes and cannibals and Red Indians swinging tomahawks. I asked Alma to do the St. Vitus's dance for me just once. But she says she can't. It happens by itself, quite suddenly. So now I always walk with Alma in case the St. Vitus's dance comes on. I would terribly like to see it and learn it myself.

My mother is glad that I feel drawn to such a good child, whose writing is the neatest in the whole class. I am always allowed to go to Alma's house and do my homework with her, but I don't particularly want to. Mrs. Kubus is always crying because her husband went to America five years ago and doesn't write to her any more. I am sorry too, because I would like to have the stamps. She thinks it's because of the war that she gets no letters, but Elise says he doesn't write because he is eating corned beef and underdone beefsteaks, and Mrs. Kubus is a vegetarian; she told me so herself. Alma is a

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vegetarian too. From the moment they are born, they eat nothing but plants, because they love animals and they want to subdue bestial tendencies. Mrs. Kubus sometimes gives me a piece of carrot cutlet when I've fetched her coal from the cellar. It doesn't taste very nice, but you grow good and noble from eating it. And from eating turnips too.

I have had to eat lots of turnips, because we have the war all the time, but they still don't think I'm good at home. Alma has been made very good by all her turnips, but I'm sure she's sly and tells her mother all my secrets and her mother passes them on, because she talks and talks, gabbling on, all the time, all the time—in the street, in the shops, with her dressmaker . . . and she always comes to Alma and me, and talks. She can't even let children work in peace.

She is long and black, like the hall of her apartment, and she says that all men who eat meat are low and crude. They think of nothing else but how to slip something into a girl's beer, for their own devilish purposes. When we are bigger, we should remember never to trust men. They would be sure to put something in our beer—gin, for instance; that was the lowest thing of all. One evening when Elise fetched me from Alma's I asked her all about it. Elise said that now that she had seen Mrs. Kubus for herself she would bet her last penny that no man had ever put anything into her beer—he wouldn't waste the gin. Mrs. Kubus was nothing but

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a silly old bag, and she probably had the St. Vitus's dance too. Oh, if only they would do the dance, just once.

Now I have let out about the order mark book. I didn't mean to. My mouth did the talking on its own. Any minute now, there'll be a ring at the front door. Any minute Mrs. Kubus will come and tell my parents, or go straight to Miss Knoll. I am full of despair.

Perhaps somehow the war will save me. It has happened a few times before. Because of the war, there was a flu epidemic once and we had holidays from school, and once we had holidays because there was no coal. Once I nearly died of flu, and everybody loved me then, and no one said anything about me taking the stuffed eagle from the art room at school and putting it in Aunt Millie's bed. The flu, and the flu holidays, saved me.

And now I have been helped again. The war has finished. There are armistice negotiations. The ground is covered with thousands of special leaflets. The grown-ups are excited and happy and unhappy too. All the soldiers are coming back to Cologne. We are fetching fir branches from the woods. My father has given me some money to buy lots of different colored tissue paper to make rosettes with wire. We're going to fix them on small fir branches and give them to the marching soldiers. There are stalls set up on the streets too, with enormous pots of steaming soup. Mrs. Meiser and Miss Lowenich want to hand out soup too. Miss Lowenich

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says she feels like crying because we have lost the war. But if there is a war someone has to lose it—the main thing is that it is all over now and nobody will be shot dead any more and everything will be different. Mr. Kleinerz thinks the same. There will be horses as well. Perhaps one of the soldiers will let me have a ride.

Alma did tell her mother about the order mark book, and she came around to see my mother. I opened the door myself, and I told her very quickly that my mother had gone away for a little while, and my father and Aunt Milly had gone to Westerwald to shoot deer. (Mrs. Kubus always keeps away from people who eat meat.) But all the same, I got frightened and I thought it was all up, and so I packed a nightdress and my silver rose. I meant to give the rose to Mrs. Schweinwald so that she would take me in for a while. The Schweinwalds have innumerable children, so one child more or less can't make any difference. They live farther out. Mr. Schweinwald is a night watchman and he sleeps during the day, except when he works in his garden because that is where his whole life is centered. I was going to leave a note for my mother to say I might come back later, when I had earned a lot of money, and that I would love her always. I would never have stayed at home if that order mark business had come out. They might have put me in a home for difficult children—you wouldn't catch me just waiting around for a thing like that to happen.

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And then peace came, with special leaflets, and at first they didn't want it. I don't know why. But now the grownups are busy with something or other the whole time and they aren't paying any attention to children now. Mrs. Kubus told Alma not to play with me any more, and the very next day she got St. Vitus's dance. I am sure it was pure spite, just because I couldn't see it.

But now I have other things to think about. We don't have to go to school, because of the difficult times and the unrest and the danger. The grass is growing over our order mark book. Mrs. Kubus has put it out of her mind too. She thinks that because there is no war now her husband, who is eating underdone beefsteaks, will send her a letter from America, and will love her, and come back to her, and she'll be able to convert him again. But I don't think he'll care in the least for her St. Vitus's dance any more, when he has seen real Red Indians dancing in America. Why should he bother with sly gossipy Mrs. Kubus and her carrot cutlets when he can eat real corned beef and see real wild Red Indians dancing their proud war dances?

*The Very Best People and the  
Horse Droppings*

Just because of the horse droppings, I am forbidden to play with Letta Mitterdank, and I nearly ruined my father's business too. He has to do business because he is a businessman. Mr. Mitterdank is terribly rich. We are rich too, but not terribly.

The Mitterdanks came to Cologne specially on account of our factory. They have shares in it.

Aunt Milly said my father doesn't close his eyes all night because he worries so, but how can she possibly know that when she doesn't see him at night? Still my mother said so too, and she also said that if the Mitterdanks came I would have to behave myself. My father has a gray face sometimes. His eyes look as if spiders had spun webs over them. I made him a wallet out of lovely shiny paper, bright red with lovely lucky pigs all over it, to make him laugh and cheer up. But he will only use it when we have more money again.

When we are at table and the bell rings, everyone groans, because it is sure to be Mr. Hornschuh. He

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comes in, with his head as bare as an egg, and his long yellow papers. He is very nice and shrugs his shoulders and says he hates having to do it, and then he sticks stamps all over our furniture. Elise says she knows what it means, and it is nothing for anyone to be ashamed about these days; it is all because of the taxes. She knows about that from her policeman. Later on perhaps people will come and take our furniture away; not the beds, though. I hope they take the big sideboard away, because then I can play with my spinning top in the living room. And if they take the piano, I shan't have to go on practicing those idiotic exercises I hate so much.

They don't take people away, only furniture, so it is not too bad. My mother told Aunt Milly it didn't really matter to her. She could easily adapt herself to more modest circumstances. The important thing was that the family was healthy and united.

Aunt Milly said she didn't dare let herself be seen on the street any more, because people kept pointing at her. That is simply not true. All that happens is that Otto sometimes makes a face at her, and I pay him a penny for it. Now that we have to economize he is doing it for nothing.

I have already decided what we will do when we have no tables and chairs any more. I shall make a campfire in the garden, and we will sit around on the ground—my mother can have a cushion—and we'll

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smoke the pipe of peace and silently eat, like noble Mohicans.

I'll be chief, because I know most about it, if my father lets me. It will be wonderful. Hans says he is feeling quite envious.

But now that the Mitterdanks have come, maybe our furniture won't be taken away, after all. There was terrific excitement at home. They talked about nothing but the Mitterdanks the whole time. They want to build themselves a home in our suburb, right by the wood where the old farm stands and where the cornfields begin. There are old forts there too. You are not allowed to go inside them, because it is dangerous. I once caught an owl in the forts when I was with Hans and Otto. She pecked at my finger till it bled, and then Mr. Kleinerz from next door gave it to the zoo, and gave me a whole bagful of satin cushions with nougat inside. But I would rather have kept the owl. I would have looked after her till she had grown enormous. Her eyes glow in the dark. I would have let her loose in Aunt Milly's room at night. She would have thought it was the devil flying onto her bed, and she would have packed up and gone. Now these Mitterdanks are building a house near the forts.

The day before the Mitterdanks came, Aunt Milly and my mother took me to town and bought me a light-blue embroidered frock in Peter's store, and white shoes and a white linen hat—even though generally they say

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it's a waste of time buying me anything decent, because I ruin all my clothes. The others in my class are nearly all better dressed than I am, but I don't care. I like my sailor blouse with its elastic round the stomach better than anything, because I can put things in it, and hide anything I find there—apples and jam jars and books and everything. Sometimes I am as fat as a bus.

They brushed my hair and dressed me, and my mother slapped my cheeks to make them look red and glowing. Then we went in a car to the Cathedral Hotel, where the Mitterdanks had invited us for lunch. A man who looked like a captain spun us through a door like a top. We walked on long, red carpets, like in a castle. I have seen lots of castles. We sometimes go and look at some in the summer holidays. But this hotel is a castle and a restaurant at the same time. I have been in restaurants too, because sometimes my mother can't be bothered to cook on Sundays; but those were only restaurants and not castles as well.

My mother took hold of my hand. All the walls in the hotel were made out of marble paperweights—my father has one of that sort. My mother had on her beautiful pink silk blouse. My father gave it to her once for a birthday present. My mother said, "Victor, you are spoiling me. You treat me like a princess!" Trautchen's mother hasn't got nearly such a nice blouse, and anyway my mother is more beautiful than Mrs. Meiser.

And we walked on carpets—on and on. It wasn't a

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street but there were real windows in the walls, with silver shoes and golden necklaces and brooches made out of diamonds. My father walked along very quietly. He didn't talk to us, and he looked white and long and black. I was much too frightened to call him Daddy. He was nearly as stern and noble-looking as the waiter in the Golden Lion when he brings my mother and Aunt Milly a mushroom omelette and says "Allow me." I got so excited my mother took me back again to the ladies' room just to make sure. They had little boxes and silver combs there, and there were mirrors everywhere. And you could have slid on the floor—but I didn't have time.

We sat down at a table. The wallpaper was soft and so were the lights and the carpets and the steps of the waiters and all the other people. There were men's fat stomachs resting quietly in armchairs, noticing nobody. Everything was quiet. Only the tablecloth shone loudly, brilliantly white, and our plates and the napkins that the waiters wrapped around the wine bottles.

"You will permit me to choose the menu?" Mr. Mitterdank said to my mother and Aunt Milly. They permitted him. I had to curtsey several times, and they put me next to the Mitterdanks' child, who is called Letta. She is going to be put in the third form at school. That's the form I'm in. She had a silk tartan dress and a white face with an enormous chin. The grownups said we should be friends, but how could we, when Letta didn't

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say anything? As a matter of fact I thought she was dumb, but suddenly she said to her mother, "Mummy, I would like some Brie cheese, some Briieeee cheese."

Then they put something on the table for the grown-ups to eat. I just couldn't believe my eyes. Snails! Real snails with little houses. Not as nice as those that crawl about on the willow tree in our garden, with little shiny ringed houses, but bigger ones, light brown. I have seen them in the Rhine Valley. They stick to the vines there. And then something horrible happened. Mr. Mitterdank, who is absolutely round, and has pink polished hands, like cushions, took out a little silver fork and scooped the snails out of their houses. Mrs. Mitterdank did the same. So did my father. Aunt Milly and my mother watched what the others were doing—and then they did the same too. But you shouldn't do that, you shouldn't! My mother and I never tread on a pretty little snail's house. And my mother has always told me I must be gentle with such timid, frightened creatures. We used to sit in the garden together, my mother and I—and sometimes I would pluck a green leaf and put a snail house on it and my mother and I would coax the snail out with a little song.

*Snail, snail, please come out  
Wave your little horns round about,  
Show your horns to the one you meet,  
Come out quickly, little sweet.*

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You had to sing it softly over and over again. And at last the little snail would creep out and trustingly crawl over the leaf. But neither of us would ever dream of touching her.

And they prodded the snails out of their houses in the hotel. "Supposing someone did that to you!" I shouted at Mr. Mitterdank and I was nearly crying. They didn't listen to me. They actually put the snails into their mouths and swallowed them down. My mother did the same, so I screamed louder and louder and I shouted, "Sing our song to the snails, and if they come out, leave them alone." Oh, grownups are always so mean and cunning. They are always saying to children or animals, "Come here, it's all right, I'm not going to do anything to you." And if you are stupid and do go to them, then they do plenty.

My mother had just put her first snail in her mouth when I started singing our snail song. Then her face got very puffed out and red and she put her handkerchief over her mouth and ran straight to the ladies' room. But even if she spit the snail out in the toilet, it still wouldn't come alive again.

Everybody looked at me furiously, my father most of all. I can always see from his face when he wants to hit me or shout at me, and I wanted very much to go away. I had an appointment in the Schweinwalds' garden anyway, for the World Record for Horse Droppings. When Mr. Schweinwald isn't sleeping during the day then he

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drinks beer in his garden shed and is fun. Hans and Otto and I often play with the Schwienwald children in the garden, and sometimes he even lets us have a sip of beer. It isn't as nice as raspberry syrup, but we drink it out of the bottle like men who build houses and streets. And then a dog suddenly turned up at the Schweinwalds'. He is like a prickly black ball, with furious eyes. He barks like mad, and he bites as well, and everyone is terrified of him. Mr. Schweinwald calls him Maria, because his wife's name is Maria and he wanted to annoy her because generally he has to knuckle under to her. But as it turns out, the dog is a girl anyway. Everyone is scared of her, but when you are her master she doesn't bite you, only the other people. We each wanted to have the dog for ourself, and be her master. I even know already whom I am going to get her to bite. Mr. Schweinwald says she is a particularly high-spirited animal, and whoever collected the most horse droppings could have Wild Maria for a prize. We have often collected horse droppings from the street for the Schweinwalds' vegetable beds. And now everyone is going to get a big bucket, and the first one to fill it up three times over gets the prize.

We were all supposed to start from the Schweinwalds' garden at three o'clock that afternoon. And so it was impossible for me to stay at the hotel any longer. I simply had to go. I wanted to win Wild Maria for my own. And anyway, I didn't want to stay with grownups

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who eat snails. Twelve snails Mr. Mitterdank ate! And his wife was eating them too! The pigs! Hans said there should be a law so that children could prevent their parents associating with such people.

It is perfectly true, on my word of honor, parents are always forbidding you to go about with someone who is a bad influence, and then they choose someone much worse than that to go about with themselves. We only pick children who aren't nasty tattletales to play with. We would fight anyone else who tried to mix in.

Another thing too. Grownups always have to have an awful lot of money. Of course, sometimes children need money for swings, or merry-go-rounds, or candy. But then we hardly ever get any, and we still manage to play all the same, and have lots of fun. But when the grownups want to have even the tiniest bit of fun, it costs a terrific lot of money. If they drink wine in the evenings, and smoke, it costs a terrific lot of money—tea parties cost a terrific lot of money—and going to a hotel must cost a terrific lot of money. Mrs. Lachs told my mother the other day, "We can't afford anything nice nowadays. The least little pleasure is beyond our means." And it's because they are always needing money that they have to be friends with such awful people. Hans says he feels sorry for them sometimes. I wonder whether we shall get like that later on?

I don't want Mrs. Mitterdank to be my mother's friend, because I am sure she doesn't like my mother. I

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don't think she likes anything. She is terrifically thin, with reddish hair and a very thin face and a deadly sharp nose like a plane handle and a thin painted mouth and faded eyes that are too delicate and dead to look at people properly. Surely a person like that can never really be a mother, because a mother must be rather like a cushion, especially in front. Otherwise there is nowhere for you to put your head when you want to cry on her, or tell her a secret before Christmas, or anything like that. You can only tell secrets to a mother who is like a cushion in front. I would never tell a secret to someone who is like a hard stick of wood. There is no hiding place anywhere on a person like that. But I don't mean I want my mother to be as fat as Mrs. Meiser either, like an enormous globe. My mother should be just like my mother, that is how.

Although the Mitterdanks kept giving us more to eat at the hotel, even so, I don't believe they liked us. My mother and Aunt Milly kept on and on talking to Mrs. Mitterdank about the theaters in Cologne, and a very practical washing machine, and how all men were the same, and how later on little Letta could go to school with me, and could always play in our garden in the summer and get her cheeks very rosy and her legs nice and brown. Mrs. Mitterdank moved her lips a little and looked tired. Mr. Mitterdank talked to my father in a wet worn-out voice.

I simply said I had to leave right away to be in time

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for my needlework class. Everyone was glad to get rid of me.

I went straight to the fountain that has those elves I like so much. "The tailor's wife was curious. . . ." That silly stupid woman went and spoiled everything when she put peas on the floor—the little elves fell down and never came back, although they had been doing all the tailor's work for him before, secretly. She was just the same kind as Mrs. Mitterdank. I have wished so many times for elves to come in the middle of the night and do my homework and my needlework for me. I hate needlework. I am always supposed to embroider samplers for the whole family at Christmas time to show how much I love them, and I never get them finished and everyone feels hurt about it. I would sooner say twenty poems, or make collections of all sorts of animals for them, or gather fir branches—secretly and at great risk—perhaps a whole Christmas tree even, from the wood. I like buying those bright embroidery silks; they feel so silky, and the colors are so lovely that they make me feel happy. But once I've started to do the embroidery, nothing looks nice any more.

I got into the tram that goes to our suburb, and at once looked calm, as if I had paid when I sat down, and had already had my ticket. The conductor didn't take any notice of me, and I badly needed to save the money.

I rode through the narrow town streets, all gray—past windows with gay clothes and blouses. Poor mother, she

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always gets clothes for presents now, never toys. She doesn't even want toys any more. Sometimes I honestly think that there is no pleasure in the world for grown-ups. When I am a grownup, I shan't get excited about toys either any more. I won't want my roller skates or my spinning tops or my hoops or dolls or anything. How shall I go on living then, when I am not glad about anything any more? Sometimes I want to cry because I have to grow up—and other times I want to grow up fast. But when I start thinking that then I shall only get useful things at Christmas time—dresses and handkerchiefs and scented soap—then I feel so wretched, I just can't be happy any more.

The conductor rang the bell. I looked out of the window. It will be Easter soon. There are colored eggs in the shops, and little bunnies, and big bunnies too with silk ribbons. I have thirteen dolls at home, all different sizes, and nineteen cuddly animals. I shall keep them and love them as long as I live.

Some Englishmen got in. We have Occupation. The Englishmen have oranges and custard powder. They all speak English as if there was nothing to it. All of us children have learned it too. I even know three forbidden swear words already, and the song about "Little Tommy Tucker" and "To bed, to bed, says Sleepy-head." Englishmen smell of uniforms and cigarettes and horses. I can smell an Englishman at once, no matter how many people are around. I don't even have to look.

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The English aren't our enemies any more. We have peace now, and butter and meat and Easter eggs made out of marzipan, and bunnies made of chocolate. You don't have to be sorry for the chocolate bunnies; you only get in a mess if you do, and land yourself in a row. Last Sunday, for instance, Uncle Halmdach gave me a chocolate bunny. It was so nice and real-looking, with happy ears. I didn't want to bite off its head or its feet or its tail because it was such a nice little animal. And so I carried it around with me. And then suddenly I was looking like a little pig because all the chocolate had melted. I licked my hands and my sailor blouse, but it didn't taste very nice because I kept thinking of the row I was going to get into, and also I was thinking about the melted Easter bunny—I might just as well have bitten off its head right away, because there is really nothing else you can do with it.

But I would rather have had chocolate just in a block, or made into an Easter egg. Chocolate should never be made like something you are fond of. Of course I don't actually believe in the Easter bunnies any more, but I love them all the same. My father loves them too, but at Christmas time he gets someone to shoot little hares for him. Their stomachs are like white cotton wool. Mr. Gumpertz shoots them in the Eiffel; my father pays for them, my mother arranges fat bacon around them, Elise pokes out their eyes. Then they eat the hares. I eat them too. My little brother hasn't started eating them yet.

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They eat snails too, they eat everything the whole time, and then they tell children that you should sing to snails and love Easter bunnies. I don't really see why they don't eat fat wicked men instead, whom they don't like and who aren't nice to look at, and who have plenty to eat on them anyway.

I can't believe anything any more. Our class teacher told us after the armistice that we should be afraid of the English, and should just ignore them because they were from perfidious Albion. We should keep our dignity and not play in the streets any more. I suppose they thought the enemy would shoot us down in the street or kidnap us. Of course nothing like that was true at all. No Englishman is interested in kidnaping children. They have children themselves. Why, they even give them away. I heard Elise with my own ears telling Aunt Milly that Mary Heuser, the porter's daughter, was getting a child from an English sergeant. Elise always knows exactly what is going on in our neighborhood. Mary is big and plump with her hair all curled and piled up in a very gorgeous hair style, and cheeks as red as poppies. These days she cries sometimes, because some of the people are nasty to her because you are not supposed to take things from the English, and you have to have pride and refuse gifts. All the same, they are always jolly glad if they do get something.

The English have a kitchen inside our washhouse. There are always hundreds of children there, so many

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you can't even count them. They have real white bread to eat, with jam, and they get soup to take away, with bits of real meat in it. Mrs. Meiser says it is just like real peacetime soup. And all the mothers pretend that they don't know it's the English who give away the soup. It was just the same with the bits of coal and the turnips that we always used to fetch secretly from the freight station.

We have a Scotsman quartered in our apartment. His name is Mac something. I am great friends with him. He is not terribly old yet, but I should think he is certainly twenty. He has a little sister in Oldham. That is a long way off. He doesn't like grownups either, and he gave me hundreds of little Scottish coats of arms made out of silk that come with his cigarettes. I am sewing them together to make a tent blanket.

When Mac first came, I was scared, because we weren't supposed to talk to strange soldiers, and I never wanted to anyway. Then once I just looked into his room when he was on parade. The whole floor was absolutely covered with oranges and custard powder. An enormous heap was lying in the corner. My father once picked oranges off a tree with his own hands. That is absolutely true. I could hardly believe it. I knew that we weren't supposed to accept gifts, so I simply took three oranges myself and a tin of custard powder too. I didn't know what it was. Hans said he thought you made a pudding out of it, but he wasn't positive.

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We decided to make a pudding with it in the Lachs' kitchen when everyone was out. But it stuck to us like a suit of armor, and the whole kitchen got stuck with it too. Hans thought he had better tell his mother that the plaster had fallen down from the ceiling. After all, it's perfectly possible. And Hans' mother always believes everything he says. She says Hans is her own child, and no child of hers would ever tell lies. Hans is very lucky to have a mother like that. He says so himself. My parents are quite different. They never believe me, and they believe me least of all when I am telling them the truth, because it's so peculiar that I start stammering, and I get all mixed up and I can't remember myself how it really was, and all the time they look at me with stern piercing eyes. So sometimes I simply say all right I did do it, just to make them stop glaring at me and asking all their questions, because by that time I honestly don't know myself whether I did it or not. Once I took all my little round candies from my toy shop, into the wood, because I thought it would be fun to put them in birds' nests. When I couldn't find any nests, I sprinkled them among the leaves instead. They looked so tiny and so red and silver and bright, I thought they would be something that little birds would like. They seemed just right for little birds. I don't tell this sort of thing to other people. I am shy of talking like this. I don't know myself why. My parents asked me what had happened to the candies, and I told them I had

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sprinkled them among the leaves in the wood. First of all my mother questioned me, and she wanted me to confess that I had eaten them. But I kept on telling the truth. Then my father had a serious talk with me, and said I should own up. And then after that I simply didn't say a word. Then both of them talked to me, and then I began to cry and I said I had eaten the candies. And then they said they would always get the truth from me in the end. But it was a lie that they got from me. When I am really lying, they believe me quite easily, because then I have arranged everything in my mind beforehand and so I can tell it much better. Why shouldn't you tell lies, anyway? I asked them once, but I won't ever do that again because they were absolutely horrified. "Because it is wicked," they answered. Yes, but why is it wicked? Why aren't you supposed to tell lies? They won't ever give you a proper answer, but they tell lies themselves all right.

Hans and I thought we would make a cement floor in our cave in the wood, so I took another three packages of the custard powder. After that, I couldn't sleep all night because I was afraid I would have to come before the military court for stealing military rations. Of course I'd have been shot.

But Mac came the next day and I talked to him, and he said I could eat all the oranges. I could have as many as I wanted, even though they didn't really belong to him either. Absolutely millions of oranges he said I

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could eat. And in return I was to be his teacher and give him German lessons. I never had time to do my homework any more, because I was a teacher myself. Now he already knows by heart the first verse of "O Tannenbaum" in German. But he doesn't exactly know what it means, and he must think it's some name for Elise; he took her hand in the kitchen, and said, "O Tannenbaum" to her. Now I am letting him learn the poem "Master Heinrich Tends the Decoy." What a decoy is I just don't know. I've asked lots of other people but they don't know either. Master Heinrich is a king, it tells you at the end. You don't have to understand everything, as long as you can just repeat it.

And I was eating oranges from morning till night, and even took some to bed with me too. They upset my stomach. I couldn't eat anything else at all because I simply couldn't stop eating oranges all the time. I have a shiny picture postcard that my father sent me from America, when I wasn't old enough to read yet. It is a picture of an engine running through trees with nothing but oranges on them. When I am grown-up I shall go there myself, and take my mother with me. I shall ride on the engine and all the time as we rush along, I shall be picking oranges for my mother. My mother will scream because there I am on the express train engine just not caring at all about the danger, and my father will be amazed to see how brave I am, and won't dare to shout, "Come down from there," in case I fall.

### *The Bad Example*

Perhaps I shall get moonstruck too. That is something very special.

All, all the oranges are little moons. At school we sing, "Lovely moon, how quietly you ride the sky." My inside is full of dozens of little moons. But Aunt Milly said I got my stomach upset through secretly reading in bed at night.

I was thinking about all this when I took the tram from the Cathedral Hotel to the Schweinwalds' to win Wild Maria. I got there just in time. I gave Mr. Schweinwald my linen hat to look after and Mrs. Schweinwald quickly tied one of her aprons around me. It was so long I fell down three times.

You have to know where to look for horse droppings. There aren't many horses about nowadays. Everyone has cars instead, and you can't get manure from them. I dashed to the old farm, and Hans dashed after me. Hans dashed to the brewery, and I dashed after him. We kept behind the horses simply waiting to pounce, and twice we got our buckets full before Otto and Alois Schweinwald. It was still a tie between Hans and me, and we dashed off again. We were fighting each other for Wild Maria, and in a fight you don't like each other and you aren't friends any more. I ran to the old farm. I was angry because Hans rushed after me again, when he could just as well have found a different place for himself. I know an old workman at the farm, and he had promised me secretly to pile up a whole heap of

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horse droppings outside the gates. He had done it too, and I saw the heap first, but Hans shouted that he had seen it first and so both of us dashed at it furiously. Afterward they said we had wallowed in the horse droppings, and behaved like pigs, not like human children at all. Not one word of this is true. Right in front of the heap Hans and I crashed straight into each other, and fell in the heap. We got up at once, and then there was a horrible scream. There was Aunt Milly just in front of us, and next to her there were my parents, and that dopey child Letta—and the Mitterdanks. They had come to see the site for their new house, and they saw us instead.

Well, how can you have your hair combed and look clean and tidy when you are in the middle of fighting for a record? My father tried his best to pretend he didn't know me, and I wasn't his child at all. But of course the Mitterdanks knew me from lunch. Mrs. Mitterdank said, "How utterly disgusting!" and said Letta shouldn't go too close to me—as if I was the spitting llama at the zoo. Then my father shouted, "Explain yourself at once!" I said nothing. The truth is you can't explain anything to a grownup who is in a temper, because he only gets worse. Hans stood beside me and nudged me consolingly. Then suddenly I heard a soft sly noise behind me and I turned around and what did I see but Alois secretly shoveling horse droppings out of our two buckets into his own. Well, after that I

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just couldn't restrain myself. Alois tore off, and I just didn't care—I tore after him and Hans followed.

It was only because of that idiotic to-do with the grownups that I didn't win. All the same, it wasn't fair, really. Hans won Wild Maria. But he couldn't keep her after all, because she bit his father's hand when he started to spank Hans. Isn't she a wonderful animal!

In the evening there was quite a commotion at home. Hans came around and Professor Lachs came with his hand all bandaged up because of the bite and looking very grave. Mr. Kleinerz from next door was there as well. My father was in rather a better mood by then because Mr. Mitterdank, thank goodness, had not taken offense. Only his wife had. Maybe I could arrange for her to get bitten later on.

So then they made a bowl of punch to make Professor Lachs feel better. My mother said that Mr. Schweinwald was a very sly one, making use of the children like that. And she was hurt because I always seemed willing to help strangers but I was always too lazy to give her a hand in our own garden. But apart from that, there didn't seem to her to be anything terrible about collecting manure. It didn't seem to her to fit in with the times at all for a child to grow up ultrarefined and snobbish. Mr. Kleinerz said he was hurt that I should never think of his garden. My father sighed and said that he didn't think there was any danger of my growing up ultrarefined and snobbish, but it didn't fit in with the times

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either if I behaved as if I was the wild unkempt child of a soldier's trollop in the Thirty Years' War. What a marvelous life those children must have had! I would have liked to have heard some more about that. But my father just went on to say I must never dare come home with that awful dog of Mr. Schweinwald's. "A real hell hound," Professor Lachs said, and everyone looked at Hans and me. We don't ever care for being looked at, but at least we were glad there was nothing worse. We had kind feelings toward everybody, and we promised to improve our manners, and let Professor Lachs exercise a good educational influence on us.

He hardly ever beats children. Generally he just exercises an educational influence on them by reading to them out of newspapers. I am sure that is much better for a child than any other punishment.

Professor Lachs read us something out of the criminal page, about the whole police force chasing a cat burglar and how they will catch him soon. The cat burglar had always been an undisciplined child, and had been led astray, and became a good-for-nothing and a criminal. He makes light of his life, and he swings over the rooftops, and no house is too high for him, no wall too smooth or steep. Professor Lachs read all this to us in a voice like a stern, ominous thunderstorm, and looked at us gravely. Everyone looked at us and nodded their heads. We nodded too, and then they sighed and drank their punch.

### *The Bad Example*

We have discovered a lonely house near the wood, Hans, Otto, and I. We play cat burglars there every day now. It is wonderful. We haven't had such a good game for ages. The other day Otto and I climbed up the drainpipe and nearly got up as far as the third floor, and yesterday Hans fell out of the window of the ground floor, and of course his stupid trousers had to tear themselves doing it!

I have got Wild Maria at home now, but nobody knows yet. I have made her a bed in the attic, and every day I take her food and bones that I get from Brewer's restaurant. They give me as much as I want. After lunch when everyone is asleep, I fetch Maria downstairs and take her for a walk to the stadium. She obeys me perfectly. But once they did hear a dog bark, at home, and they couldn't make it out.

I can't ever live without Wild Maria now. I've got a plan. Quite soon, Hans, Otto, and I are going to climb the walls of our apartment in the pitch dark and make suspicious noises outside the windows, so that they will think it's a cat burglar. And after that I shall come along quite quietly and read from the newspaper that only an alert watchdog can ensure the safety of human lives. Aunt Milly and my mother will see the point at once, and they will talk my father around. Then I shall bring in Wild Maria to be the savior of the family. I will tell them I have already trained her, at the Schweinwalds'.

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Actually I do train her, but for important things. I mean to take her to school soon and I shall take her with me to the headmistress and ask whether I am going to be moved up. Then she will start saying that unfortunately I lack proper manners, and my behavior is deplorable, and my work and . . . and at just that moment I shall give Wild Mary a tiny push, and her eyes will glow and flicker, and her hair will stand up on end, and she will growl savagely, and bare her teeth. "My dear, good, hard-working child," the headmistress will cry, "don't upset yourself, you good girl. Of course you shall be moved up."

I would have liked to keep a tiger for such occasions, or a lion maybe. But Wild Mary can growl far more evilly and weirdly than a lion, and she looks even more wicked and deadly.

## 9

*Hey Presto—The Truth!*

They've got to go. Aunt Betty and Cousin Lina have simply got to leave. Our Elise too says these Auerbach people are absolutely unbearable. If everyone in Auerbach is like that, then I'm jolly glad we live somewhere else.

It was my Aunt Milly's idea—she lives with us; she is my mother's sister but much older—to invite Aunt Betty and Cousin Lina from Auerbach to stay. And it has messed up all my Whitsun holidays. Everyone says my cousin Lina is a most beautifully behaved child, and should serve me as a shining example. Now she sleeps in my room and she is thirteen years old and she looks like a giraffe in the zoo—very long and thin with sly pricked-up ears and brown eyes that pop out of her head. All that's missing is the beautiful spotted fur. This beastly giraffe is simply ruining my life and it's all Aunt Milly's fault. She is forever embroidering cushion covers for her mother, and I have to do the same, otherwise it proves I am devoid of any affection, and anyway

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it was high time I acquired some ladylike accomplishments.

At lunch the Giraffe turns her hands round like corkscrews and stares at mine, and says in a very high shocked voice, "Oh my goodness! How can I possibly eat when I can see your filthy hands!" My hands are just so made that they get filthy all the time. Washing doesn't make any difference. And then the Giraffe stares at my plate. I am scared with every single bite that I'll swallow one of her eyes as well; she stares so hard, they look as if they'll fall out of her head onto my plate. I hate the way she fixes her eyes on me. I can't eat the skin of the meat, or the fat, or shining herring scales—it makes me feel sick, and I have to really get a grip on myself when I get some in my mouth. The grownups say I must overcome this weakness. I should not waste the precious gifts of God. There are plenty of poor children who would be only too glad to have something so nice. And anyway, you must always leave your plate clean and empty. And then they go and put things I don't want on it. My father would never leave his plate clean if someone heaped carrots on it. My father would get absolutely furious. He can't bear carrots, and that's why he has a special helping of stuffed cabbage when the rest of us have carrots. And I can't bear fat. And I cut it off secretly and push it under my knife and fork when everyone else has finished. Nobody has ever noticed anything up to now.

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And now the Giraffe comes and stares at my plate and says, "But you've hidden that delicious fat under your knife and fork!" And Aunt Betty sighed to my mother, "My dear, how spoiled the child is. Of course, I am only a widow. I can't afford to spoil my children. We have no fat to throw away." Everyone is looking at me, to see that I eat up the fat. I tried to, I meant to, I swallowed hard, and tears came into my eyes. Then the Giraffe said, "That's right, now eat up the rest as well." So I took the rest off my plate and I threw it right across the table straight into the Giraffe's face and shouted that I didn't want good fat to be spoiled, I just didn't want to eat it, and even if I were a poor starving child I still wouldn't eat it. And I screamed that Aunt Betty wasn't really poor, but the old rag woman who searched all the garbage cans, she *is* poor, and she often really does go hungry, but all the same Mr. Meiser once offered her a plate of mussels because the Meisers had so many, they were going bad, and the old rag woman actually shuddered and said she'd never eat those things even if Mr. Meiser paid her ten marks. Mr. Meiser didn't understand because he thinks mussels are the most wonderful delicacy in the world; he thought she was crafty and really got much more to eat than people think she does.

My mother says I have to eat or I won't get strong. I want terribly to be terrifically strong. Sometimes I think about what I would do then. I would swing rocks around in the mountains. I would carry my father on

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one hand from one room to another, without batting an eyelid. I would break down the doors of prisoners' cells. I would take on thirty children in the street at once. I would ride through the town on tigers and lions. I would just throw myself against hurtling cars and stop them dead.

I could lift the washing machine onto the stove without my mother having to touch it.

Actually I am doing something now specially to get strong. I found some "Oriental Strength Pills" in Aunt Milly's bedside table, and I swallow one secretly from time to time.

That lunchtime, they said that I was a shockingly untruthful, naughty child, and sent me out of the dining room before the dessert. I was supposed to wait for my punishment. I went into the kitchen to talk to Elise. She still had a bit of pudding left that I could have and we sang the most lovely song together—"I Go Shooting the Hart in the Wild Wild Wood." That is the favorite song of a very nice policeman we know. Other policemen think themselves very important and then Hans and I sing at them "'Ere stands a copper, 'Ere stands a copper, who ain't done a thing all day!" And then they get angry and we run away quickly. Elise's policeman is called Erich, and he and Elise are walking out. She said he was going to ask for her hand at her parents next Sunday. I asked her if the policeman couldn't simply just arrest Aunt Betty and the Giraffe and send

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them back to Auerbach, and Aunt Milly as well. Elise said she wished he could. But then she shook her head till all her little brown curls flew about, and she said unfortunately you would need a proper warrant for that.

Life is beastly. I can't have a secret read in bed at night any more. The Giraffe watches me closely all the time. And they took a wonderful Red Indian magazine away from me—*The Scalp of a White Woman* it was called. Hans lent it me, and he got it from Matthias Ziskorns, and it doesn't belong to him either, and I shall forfeit the respect of my tribe if I don't give it back. The Giraffe sometimes reads a book called "*My Fawny Countess, When Will Your Heart Speak?*" and I wanted to pinch it and give it to Hans instead of *The Scalp of a White Woman*. But it is such a stupid, boring book. There is nothing about Red Indians in it, or cannibals or little people—or wild animals either.

Aunt Betty said our Elise was nosy and lazy, and Elise said the Giraffe was sly, and that Aunt Betty was malicious and that she kept saying nasty things about my parents to Aunt Milly. And once my mother said to my father, "Oh my dear, I can't stand Betty's everlasting insinuations any longer." My father said that it was the nature of females to have hateful feelings about each other, and these feelings were bound to break out from time to time. I have noticed that too, when that beast Mrs. Meiser and Old Knoll and Low-as-low Lowenich let their hateful feelings break out against

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me. But of course something in me breaks out against them too. But nothing breaks out in me against my mother and Elise, and after all they are females too.

Elise said that there was a nervous strain on the whole house, and if these Auerbach people stayed another ten days something terrible would happen. Elise already knew something terrible would happen from a dream she had about a broken soup tureen and moldy bread wrapped up in ferrets' skins. Elise has a real Egyptian dream book, and if you are an expert you can interpret everything with it. I simply stopped the terrible thing from happening that was going to happen anyway in ten days time and arranged for it to happen sooner, so that the Auerbach people could leave right away. This is how it happened.

My mother arranged a small party in Aunt Betty's honor, so that no one could say she hadn't done her best for her. My mother said to Elise, "We must go to a lot of trouble and do everything right. We'll have stuffed pigeons. Everything must be light. My sister-in-law has a delicate stomach." And then they spent hours working in the kitchen. My father had to come home from business on the dot, because it is the husband's job to prepare the herb punch.

Aunt Betty was there, and Aunt Milly and Mr. Kleinerz from next door and Uncle Halmdach. He is my father's cousin. Aunt Milly doesn't like him, because he came to see us on Ash Wednesday and immediately

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fell asleep on the light silk sofa. With a paper hat on, and dirty boots! I got goose pimples with joy and excitement, because I loathe this sofa. Only visitors are allowed to sit on it and even then no one is very happy about it. I have only to look at the sofa, and they start screaming at once, and behave as if I had made it dirty and rubbed the silk. Once I brought Christine Moosbach home with a few other children, because my mother and Aunt Milly had gone to town to buy health corsets. That kind of thing takes time. I only hoped that for once they wouldn't bring me something home, like an itchy woolen vest or specially healthy shoes that I can't walk in, and that make the other children roar with laughter, or a healthy practical waterproof apron which makes them laugh too, or a healthy practical back-straightener. They say they buy them out of love for me, but all these healthy practical things they keep buying are just a terrible torture for me. They have no idea what it's like when I am the only one to go to school in a healthy practical rain hat, made out of oil-cloth and flannel, when no one else wears anything half as peculiar. I don't care about rain, but I do care about the hat, and when I had to put it on because the weather was bad I took it off again as soon as I was out of the house and stuffed it into my book bag. And then I was still frightened that at the tram stop someone would see me with my head bare in the rain. And then just because the hat had got rather squashed inside my bag,

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they started lecturing me about not taking care of the expensive things they had bought me, and how my poor father had to work so hard to make enough money for them, and they could never afford to buy such expensive things for themselves. I wish they couldn't afford to buy me anything any more at all. Besides they are always wanting me to be grateful and pleased, when they buy me something like that.

When my mother and Aunt Milly had gone up to town that time, I took Christine and the others into the drawing room and let them all sit down next to each other on the silk sofa, because I was going to give them a special treat. Well they were all sitting there on the sofa, and they were not particularly enjoying themselves, and they were waiting for me to think of a game or some magic, when Aunt Milly came back unexpectedly and went absolutely stiff with horror. Christine and the others couldn't make any sense of it because I had told them that my father had a hundred sofas and they should sit just on this one and it didn't matter in the least if they broke it, and then I would do something special and maybe swing on the chandelier. I thought it was nice to have so many people at once sitting on the stupid dead-looking sofa. Aunt Milly didn't think it was nice at all. And later on they treated me like that dreadful man who desecrated the altar with a sardonic laugh—it was in the mission paper that they keep meaning to stop because they can't afford it.

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Uncle Halmdach lay on the sofa without caring at all. And he said that he hadn't seen a bed since Carnival Saturday, and now he needed a rest, and he could do with twenty marks too.

The other day he wanted to drink a bottle of our brandy. My father wasn't there, and Aunt Milly said unfortunately we didn't happen to have a corkscrew. Then Uncle Halmdach said that didn't matter at all; he didn't have many talents but nature had endowed him with the gift of opening bottles with a perfectly ordinary nail file. And then he actually did it, and later he sketched Aunt Milly on the new white tablecloth as a revolving steam turbine. Aunt Milly was absolutely furious, and Uncle Halmdach said that if he ever had a car, he would have Aunt Milly on the hood as his mascot, and all the traffic policemen would run away—only it would have to be a very strong car, a tank most likely. Aunt Milly hates hearing anyone say she is a statuesque type of woman because that means an enormous fat woman who eats more than five pieces of Dutch cherry tart with cream in the afternoon at the pastry shop, looking glum and solemn because at lunchtime she didn't have gravy or soup because her doctor had put her on a slimming diet. And once Aunt Milly said that fundamentally she had the sensitive spirit of a little bird and the delicate nature of clinging ivy. That's why she gets cross when Uncle Halmdach says, "Milly, you have a behind like one of Frederick the Great's battle

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horses." I like Uncle Halmdach very much. He draws funny things for newspapers and once he gave me a jack-in-the-box.

After the dinner party everyone sat in the sitting room. The Giraffe and I were allowed to go in too, and we got a small port glass full of punch to drink as well. We had been given permission to stay up till nine, but before that I had already sent the balloon up—long before.

Everyone was being very polite, as if they only knew each other very slightly. The moon shone yellow through the curtains. My mother put a bowl of violets next to the flowering almond tree that Mr. Kleinerz had given her, because she likes almond blossom better than any other flowers, because they remind her of her first ball dress that was so pink and gay. They think hemlock is wicked and ugly because it is poisonous, but I think hemlock is quite as nice as pampas grass and it isn't really wicked because it doesn't do anyone any harm, and it doesn't poison other hemlock, or any other flowers that grow with it. It's just that you can't eat it like spinach, but, after all, most human beings wouldn't like to be minced up and eaten like spinach, either.

Whenever my mother gets flowering plants given to her we first of all always take off the crepe paper that is wrapped around them, and afterward we plant them in the garden. The crepe paper Hans and I sometimes

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use as crowns, when we play Indian kings and reign over our lands.

"What an exquisite smell of spring," said Aunt Milly.

"Allow me, Betty," said my father, and filled her glass, and lit a cigar for himself. "Thank you so much," said Aunt Betty, smoothing her hair. "There is a joyous peace in your home, Victor. Your little wife is a dear soul, but she seems to me to be just a little extravagant."

"Drink up, Betty," said my father.

I was very angry because Aunt Betty had said Elise was a thief. My mother had said in the kitchen that Elise worked so hard and willingly she should have some stuffed pigeon and some cake and as much of everything as she wanted, and should take some for Erich too, and she shouldn't worry one way or the other. Afterward in the hall, Aunt Betty whispered to my mother, "My dear, aren't you a little too prodigal? The girl will take quite enough for herself behind your back."

"Why ever should she take things behind my back, Betty, when she can take all she wants right in front of my eyes?" said my mother. And she added, "After all, she isn't much more than a child, so I only hope I haven't spoiled her pleasure telling her that. I know my monkey of a daughter likes the apples she steals from the attic much better than the ones I give her."

"Your strange opinions will take you into some very odd situations my dear," whispered Aunt Betty. "Wait

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till she steals a diamond ring from you.” My mother laughed softly, “What do you mean—a diamond ring, Betty! I only have one. I haven’t any others and I don’t want any others either.”

Aunt Betty finished her drink and pinched my face really hard and certainly quite unlovingly, and said, “Your little daughter has improved quite noticeably, brother dear. Being in the company of her little cousin has done her good. I think for the little one’s sake I should not think of myself and should stay here with Lina permanently.” I got the shock of my life.

Uncle Halmdach came and asked for a brandy or a stiff double gin, because the punch wasn’t any good. Married men couldn’t make a decent punch he said. My father said softly that he would be very glad to go out for a glass of beer with Uncle Halmdach later on, and Mr. Kleinerz said he would too. Uncle Halmdach sometimes is full of despair and says that no good comes out of all this drinking—nothing but mischief and mental torture—and all the money that he goes to such trouble to earn just goes to the devil, and he will never touch another drop. But he forgets about this later on, when he has stopped feeling so bad.

Aunt Milly clinked glasses with Mr. Kleinerz and said, “Oh, I shall get tipsy.” “Then you will tell us all the truth, Milly, won’t you?” called out Aunt Betty. “Don’t children and drunkards always tell the truth, Cousin Halmdach? That is the popular belief, is it

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not?" "Old plush brain," Uncle Halmdach murmured to my father. "When this poor jaundiced bag of sour grapes trills those words 'popular belief' I feel quite sorry for her, and would like to psychoanalyze her and present her with a bunch of flowers. I can tell you, I for one have told the most beautiful lies when I was drunk."

Suddenly it occurred to me that when a child tells them the truth they never believe it, and don't even let you finish, and so this time I suddenly thought I would be a drunkard speaking the truth. I know exactly how drunkards behave, from Mr. Lebrecht opposite. His first name is actually Pancras. Sometimes I repeat names like this to myself. They taste like mysterious cake. I turn them over in my mouth and keep thinking about all sorts of different things. In Cologne there's Mauritius Way and Mauritius Street, and when I go by tram I always wait for the conductor to call out "Mauritius," it makes me so excited and happy, like curls and flowers and soft rain mixed up together. I really only need to go as far as the Opera House for school, but sometimes I go an extra stop just to hear the conductor call out "Mauritius Way." Sometimes he doesn't call it out, and then I get off and read the name on the indicator till my eyes can hear it.

Mr. Lebrecht runs from one bar to another, looking for gin, and almost falls over in the street. All the children run after him. His legs wobble and his eyes roll around, and his wife has nothing to laugh about. Some-

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times he stands very stiffly and stretches out his arms, and raves and raves, and threatens and threatens, and stumbles and falls and talks. His eyes are blind, he can't see anything, but he knows that there are children about. He talks to the sky and the air. He doesn't talk to the children. Everything is like thunder. Mr. Lebrecht is like slow thunder. He says everything he wants.

I know how drunkards behave, and I wanted Aunt Betty and the Giraffe to go. So I became a drunkard, and I loosened my joints like I learned to do in my beastly orthopedic lessons, and I fell down on the floor, I got up again and I swayed backward and forward and then pointed fixedly to the Giraffe, and sighed and set my head wobbling—just like Pancras Lebrecht.

Everyone jumped up and stared at me. I spoke in a sinister voice. "She is wicked. Cousin Lina is wicked. Aunt Betty is wicked too. She said my mother wastes money, and that my father looked unhappy having such a wife. And Aunt Betty said my mother couldn't get any other husband in her desperate financial position, or she would never have married such a selfish quick-tempered tyrant as my father. She said all this to Aunt Milly. Elise heard her, and I heard her too. And that time we had only cabbage soup for lunch and nothing else, Aunt Betty said they needn't put up a show of poverty to her in her own brother's house. And just now she said my mother wanted to flaunt her stuffed pigeons

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in a poor widow's face, and that she had been cheated out of her inheritance too, and that a lace brassière showed plenty. And they said that Elise is a thief. I will tell Erich they said that, I will tell the policeman, let me go, let go of me, I want to, I'll tell the policeman, I . . ." When you are drunk you have to say the same thing over and over again at the end.

They pulled me about. I fell down again, and just said "la la la" this time. "She is mad," Aunt Betty said to my father, and "Oh dear, what a sad thing," and "Victor, there was never any mental trouble in our family." "Drunk," Aunt Milly moaned and she was obviously terribly scared I would start on her next. "Not a bit of it," Uncle Halmdach said. "The child is certainly not just drunk. She is like a textbook case of delirium tremens. It's magnificent." "But she didn't even take a single drop from her glass," Aunt Milly said suddenly in a dark voice. "The child has a depraved character. She is simulating." "Yet she seems to speak the truth," said Mr. Kleinerz suddenly. I love him. He is clever and always helps me.

I thought my father would give me a spanking, but my father went for Aunt Betty, and Aunt Betty went for Aunt Milly, and Aunt Milly went for Elise, who was just bringing in the biscuits. It was a pity I had to lie on the floor being drunk. I couldn't take any biscuits.

The grownups had forgotten all about me. They might even have trampled me to death by mistake if

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my mother and Mr. Kleinerz hadn't dragged me out of the room. I stayed quite silent and stiff. I only wanted everything to go all right, and I didn't really know any more what was supposed to be going all right, or what it was I really wanted.

My mother cried and said she must call in Dr. Bohnenschmidt because I was drunk and mentally ill. So I got better at once and kissed her. She put me to bed. We said our prayers, and later on Elise came. We sang "I go shooting the hart in the wild wild wood, the deer in the forest deep, the timid duck on his lonely lake, and the eagle in his keep . . ." The bit about the eagle is the best. It makes us both cry, and we sing at the top of our voices like men and wild soaring trumpets.

Then suddenly my mother came in, and she said, "But why do you sing such violent songs? You are so fond of animals. Why do you want to shoot them all?" But I hadn't done anything, I hadn't hurt any animals at all. I just wanted to sing at the top of my voice, and I like the wonderful eagle in his keep whatever anyone says.

"Elise," my mother said, "my sister-in-law has received a telegram. She will have to take the sleeper to Leipzig, with her daughter. She would like you to help her with the packing. I will give a hand too. Are you too tired?" "Oh no, I would simply love to help," said Elise very happily and gaily.

"And you, you little devil, you go to sleep," said my

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mother. "But you needn't think we have forgotten your dreadful behavior." Then she looked for all the Giraffe's things, and thank goodness gave me another kiss to make my dreams sweet, and to calm me down. "Go to sleep."

But I was so excited I simply couldn't go to sleep. I kept thinking about the Giraffe traveling in a sleeper. A sleeper is a traveling bed. It's the most wonderful thing I can think of—there is nothing in the world I want so much as to ride on my bed—quickly and smoothly through all the streets, up and down, through valleys and hills. And then I dreamed that I flew out of the window on my bed, higher and higher, right into the clouds. Below there are houses and trains with traveling beds. The Giraffe is going too, but I am flying in my bed, flying, flying, flying. . . .

## IO

*Aunt Milly Nearly Gets Married*

Everyone says that Aunt Milly is overripe. It is driving everyone mad, and we will never get rid of her unless she gets a husband. Elise says every woman needs to have a man of her own. I will have to have one later on, the same as everyone else. It just can't be helped. My father belongs to my mother. Not a single bit of him is Aunt Milly's really, even though she does live with us. And my brother and I belong to my mother too. Of course Aunt Milly wouldn't take me as a gift—anyway I wouldn't let myself be given to her—but she would like to have my little brother when he isn't crying and hasn't wet himself. Our apartment belongs to my mother too. There is nothing that belongs to Aunt Milly. But she scolds me all right when I've broken something, and she always has ideas about educating me and keeps telling tales about me. Oh, it is sheer torture.

Actually, I don't quite understand about marriage. Elli, my friend, says when you are married you have to take all your clothes off in front of a strange man. I just don't believe it. I would feel dreadfully shy, and Elli

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says she would sooner become a Bride of Heaven, then she certainly wouldn't have to do anything like that, in fact they'd do the opposite and give her a uniform.

Elise has just told me a terribly important secret. Aunt Milly is getting a whole crowd of men from the local paper. Nobody is supposed to know a thing about it. Aunt Milly is keeping it all absolutely secret, but Elise always knows everything and is looking forward to seeing the men. We are both keeping our fingers crossed because we want them to take Aunt Milly away. And this is what she has written to the paper: "Heart-felt wish. Youthful lady of forty, gay disposition, Ju-noesque type, warm deep soul, fond of nature, brunette, with small fortune, wishes to bring sunshine into lonely life of idealist in assured position." Elise says it is a mystery to her how such a grumpy quarrelsome piece of work could ever imagine herself to have a gay disposition, but perhaps she would change when she was with men and become quite sweet and sunny. With women, anything was possible.

Elise is another one who wants Aunt Milly to go, because Aunt Milly is always being mean to her and interfering with her and keeps chasing her around all the time. That's why she is secretly reading the letters that the men from the advertisement are sending Aunt Milly, and she tells me all about it, and I tell Mr. Kleinerz from next door, and Mr. Kleinerz tells my mother, and my mother tells my father. Nobody be-

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lieves that any man would want Aunt Milly, but the whole house is terribly worked up and excited. Aunt Milly keeps buying blouses and bows and collars and new arch supports.

Everyone could see that Aunt Milly had got something up her sleeve, and then Aunt Milly told my mother all about it, and said a Mr. Lothar Broselius wanted to call that afternoon at a mutually convenient time to meet Aunt Milly face to face and eye to eye. He had sent a letter to Aunt Milly, and he was an ideal lonely widower, absolutely healthy and soulfully inclined. Elise had to make some pure coffee without any chicory in it, and the bottle of best brandy was fetched from the sideboard. This got me rather scared.

My mother had put this bottle of best brandy by for a special occasion. But once there actually was a special occasion, when Uncle Halmdach came round to see us and there was only me at home. Whenever he comes he always asks, "Isn't there anything worth drinking in this house?" My mother and Aunt Milly hate giving him anything. But this time Uncle Halmdach promised he'd take me to a real big circus. Of course he can go anywhere he likes, because he draws for the papers. And he said he would give me a football and he said he would put on a devil's mask and frighten that old beast Miss Lowenich right out of our street. I thought it would be such fun if Uncle Halmdach stayed and played with me, and that's why I secretly took the

### *The Bad Example*

bottle of best brandy out of the sideboard. It had already been opened and one glassful of brandy had been taken out as a sample, and all the brandy was much older than I am. I never meant Uncle Halmdach to drink the lot, but he simply finished the whole bottle. I was terrified. Then we sang a duet, very loudly and artistically: "When the hedgerows are in bloom, are in bloom, in the wood . . ." And then I felt so desperate, I filled the bottle up with cold tea from the kitchen—it's the same color, after all—and I put the bottle back in the sideboard.

This was the special bottle that was put on the table for Mr. Lothar Broselius. Now nothing could possibly go right. There were narcissuses on the table. Aunt Milly dusted the furniture a hundred times over. Elise said at once no man would ever think of looking at the top of the furniture. Only women were nasty enough to do that.

Aunt Milly put on her dark blue silk dress. My mother said yes, this looked better on her than the flowered one did. Then Aunt Milly said my mother just wanted her to look like an old woman, and she took off the dark blue one and put on the flowered one again. And then she took off the flowered one and put on the dark blue one again—backward and forward all the time. Afterward she cried, and the big mirror in my parents' room got blind from top to bottom she breathed on it so. My mother's hands were trembling.

## *Aunt Milly Nearly Gets Married*

Would I please stop whistling! The bell rang. Every-body shrieked like mad. Elise was supposed to be quickly ironing a white lace collar and opening the door at the same time. I was going to open the door for her, but they all screamed at me, "Keep out of the way, for heaven's sake! Every budding happiness is threatened when you are around."

So I listened at the keyhole in the living room, next to the drawing room. Because I simply had to know what was going to happen about the bottle of brandy, or whether we would really get rid of Aunt Milly.

Elise went to open the door. They stopped shouting in the bedroom. Into the drawing room came a round man with very short legs—just where his stomach stopped, his feet began straight away. He rubbed his hands and looked quietly at the picture on the wall which Uncle Halmdach painted of me, where I looked like my mother would if she looked like me. No one could possibly have known if he had quickly pinched some whipped cream off the table, but the round man behaved absolutely perfectly. His hair was gray and well-brushed, and his face was red and smooth like a tomato. There were hart's teeth hanging from his watch chain. They always fascinate me. I would have liked to have seen them closer.

Aunt Milly came in. The round man looked up. The sun was shining in his face. Aunt Milly was wearing the flowered dress. She was holding on to her bosom. It's

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as big as a balloon. The red man blew his breath down his nose like a railway engine. Then Aunt Milly made a face like the fairy in the Christmas play at the theater where she bends her head over the kneeling prince to save him.

And they talked of coffee and cake and how Mr. Broselius used to have a delicatessen shop only now his son-in-law has it. He said that Aunt Milly's outward appearance pleased him very much. A man of riper years liked something comfortably round, not something all twittery. And he said that he was sure Aunt Milly loved nature just the way he did—not long tramps that only made you perspire, but comfortable hours on a terrace by the Rhine with an open-air concert. That's where his idealism lay. He knew all the operas. His dead wife had had a passion for Wagner. She too had been stately and plump like Aunt Milly. And perhaps they might drink a bowl of May punch together soon in the Forest Inn.

I listened to every single word, and then Aunt Milly poured out a glass of the best brandy for herself and Mr. Broselius. My heart started thumping. But everything was all right. Aunt Milly didn't really touch hers at all, and Mr. Broselius only took one sip of his, and gave a dreadful shudder without saying a word and left the rest. Everyone said afterward that his moderation made an excellent impression, and they put the bottle of best brandy with the tea in it back in the sideboard, because it's better for brandy if you keep it lying down. Mr.

### *Aunt Milly Nearly Gets Married*

Broselius could have made everything wonderful and we might easily have got rid of Aunt Milly, but then those photographs of Boris Castor arrived. Elise, of course, knew all the details at once. "Do you know, a young man has written to Aunt Milly, a young man of Hungarian descent with a deep feeling for music, condemned to a terrible fate that has cast him far from any understanding human soul." Aunt Milly wrote back to him, he wrote back to Aunt Milly and sent some photographs of himself with black curls and a very pale face and absolutely enormous popping eyes. Aunt Milly didn't want Mr. Broselius any more. Nothing would satisfy her but Boris Castor.

Aunt Milly cried and screamed to my mother. This Mr. Broselius was too coarse, too old, another destiny was hers, by the side of a sensitive soul. And he had written that in her letters he could hear the youthful spirit of an eighteen-year-old speaking to him, and that was what mattered. Everyone begrudged her the slightest happiness, screamed Aunt Milly, and prying eyes were always following her. And she looked years younger than my mother because she had not been exhausted mentally and physically by years and years of marriage. And only the other day she was standing in front of the movie theater—she could point out the exact spot if anyone didn't believe her—and a man kept walking up and down in front of her singing "Girlie, girlie, you sweet girlie . . ." and had given her per-

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fectly unmistakable looks. And she was going to meet Mr. Boris Castor on Saturday afternoon, and no jealous relatives and no power on earth would hold her back.

Elise knew that she had arranged to meet Boris Castor in Princes Hotel, and she said a handsome young man would never want Aunt Milly.

I was so desperate that he should want her, and Hans was in favor of it too, both for friendship's sake and because we had taken an oath in the gang, and also because Aunt Milly had told tales about us on Monday when we'd been playing football with the English soldiers in the field at the back of the house instead of getting on with our homework.

So we made a plan, Hans and me. Hans said somehow or other we had to give Aunt Milly some power of attraction, because she is old and fat and not in the least bit pretty, not even with her new permanent wave. And so she would only be attractive to Boris Castor if she were a princess. The Lachs know a princess. She is not beautiful either, but whenever her husband dies, she always gets a new one right away. Mr. Kleinerz too said, "A princess still has a definite appeal."

On Saturday afternoon, Hans and I went to Princes Hotel and crept up on them. They were sitting by the window, Aunt Milly and the pale young man with the popping eyes. Aunt Milly looked scarlet in the face, her hair was wildly on end. The man was eating roast duck and talking at the same time. He looked weepy.

## *Aunt Milly Nearly Gets Married*

Hans carried out our plan. He went straight across to the phone booth on the other side of the square. For a long time he had been practicing saying in a deep, stern masculine voice, "Would you please call Princess Milly von Kaltweiss to the telephone—Princess Milly von Kaltweiss." Aunt Milly's name is Kaltweiss anyway, so she would go to the telephone all right, if someone called her. My father often gets called to the telephone in a restaurant and he always goes all right. And Boris Castor would think Aunt Milly was secretly a princess, and she had not told him because she wanted to test his love. As a matter of fact, Elise had been reading a novel about a dollar princess, and her suitors who were really only after her money. She was on the verge of despair, and she dressed herself in rags, and a fair-haired chauffeur took pity on her and thought she was a beggar maid—but he saw her secret shining through the holes in her dress, and he recognized it because he was a duke himself.

Of course, Aunt Milly would tell Boris Castor later on that she wasn't really a princess at all, but he would go on believing she was just the same. And everybody in the restaurant would stare at Aunt Milly when she was paged, and would find her as beautiful as a proud wild princess.

Hans meant to speak to Aunt Milly on the telephone in a disguised voice that sounded like an oracle. And so he learned by heart a piece out of a book called *The Gift*

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*of the Apeman.* In this book, the trembling heart of a girl is warned every night by mysterious calls—"Pay attention! Don't waver my lovely one! Salvation is at hand! Happiness rides on a white stallion! But beware of the mind-destroying sweetness of the flaming red poppy! Shun the poison drug in every form!"

I hung about near the entrance to Princes Hotel for ages. At last a waiter called out, "Her Highness Princess Milly von Kaltweiss." And then he said it all over again. It was absolutely terrific. I nearly believed Aunt Milly really was a princess when she walked so beautifully to the telephone booth. Everyone stared. I was completely happy. They would get married soon, Aunt Milly and Boris Castor.

I was just thinking to myself, now Hans will have got up to the mind-destroying sweetness of the flaming red poppy, when Boris Castor suddenly popped out at me with his hat and coat on. "Little one," he said, and he kept running, dragging me along with him. I would never let myself be smacked by one of Aunt Milly's men. I would kick them on the shins first. But it turned out he didn't want to smack me. He gave me some coins from his coat pocket and he talked very quickly and kept on pulling me along. "Little one, tell the fat lady—she is sitting by the window, and she's just telephoning now, she's drinking a cup of coffee and she has a flowered dress on—tell her that the gentleman felt queer

### *Aunt Milly Nearly Gets Married*

—malaria attack—keeps recurring—from the tropics—she shouldn't wait." And off he went.

Well, first of all, we got change in a tobacconists', Hans and I. Then we found a very small dirty child behind the lemonade stand on the square, and gave him five pennies and showed him where Aunt Milly was sitting and told him to tell her that the gentleman had had an attack of the tropics and she shouldn't wait.

Then we had some ice cream and we got back the money we had spent in the phone booth as well. Nothing in the world made sense to us any more. Why had he run away? Would he come back, perhaps? Maybe a princess was not important enough and we should have made Aunt Milly a queen? And then I came home in the evening and there was a terrific row. I simply couldn't make head or tail of it. Aunt Milly had an attack even worse than the pale man's. Everyone says it was my fault. First of all, I said, to think me capable of such a thing is extremely mean. Then they drilled their questions into me, more and more and more questions, and suddenly they saw the whole thing. Aunt Milly started screaming that I had destroyed the happiness of her life, torn my father's nerves into shreds, driven my mother to the point where she couldn't stand this existence. And then what do grownups do, when they can't think of anything else to do in their rage and bad temper? They beat a poor child. Mr. Kleinerz came round and said that Aunt Milly had every reason to be

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grateful to me, but that didn't help at all. Aunt Milly screamed that this Boris Castor was the most refined and noble type of man, and he had been frightened away because he had thought she wanted to show off in a vulgar, despicable and dishonest way. His nerves had suffered in the tropics—the disappointment about her because she pretended to him, and all the excitement had brought on an attack of malaria—and now the poor man would be staggering about in despair. "He even forgot to pay for the duck. Who will make good my expenses?"

"Hm, one of these spongers," said Mr. Kleinerz, and Aunt Milly shouted that Mr. Kleinerz was vulgar. A very ill man, with one foot in the other world already, can easily forget things . . . but I was the cause of everything.

Then Uncle Halmdach came. My father said at once, "You've had one too many again." Uncle Halmdach got told the whole business all over again. I was terrified that he had forgotten the to-do we had with the bottle of best brandy and would ask for some. But thank goodness he took a glass of the Moselle my father was drinking to calm his nerves.

Aunt Milly took some pills and cried. She would never get over it. She had been made to look a show-off in front of a humble, modest creature who had enormous possessions in Hungary and had never even

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breathed a word about them. And I wasn't a child, but the devil incarnate.

Then Uncle Halmdach banged his fist on the table to cheer me up. And he promised he would give me one of the young panthers out of the zoo that I love so much. He is always promising me things, but I hardly ever get them.

But afterward in the hall, he gave me a secret piece of advice, speaking as a grownup and a journalist who is in touch with everything. He said this affair about the princess had probably been a mistake. And instead of asking Princess von Kaltweiss to come to the phone, we should just ask for Comrade Kaltweiss next time.

Comrade Kaltweiss. I shall remember that. Hans and I will have another go when she meets the next man. Maybe we can patch everything up this way.

## II

*When I Was a Child Prodigy*

The whole thing was due quite simply to those enormous masses of candied fruit my mother has in her side-board. I absolutely adore candied fruit, but it never really agrees with me. So of course I had to spend seven days in bed, suffering and bored to death, and on top of everything I had a row with Hans, when he came to visit me and we played the oracle of Delphi. You see, when I press my hands, or a pillow, tight against my face, flaming stars appear, little ones and enormous ones, and brilliant colored suns change into whirling streaks. It makes me see the most glorious colors that only exist in heaven. I told Hans about it and he immediately said I'd got to be the oracle of Delphi. Hans came with the Schweinwald children and they brought along a tray with charcoal on it that they'd pinched out of our Elise's flatiron. And they put this mess in front of my bed and lit the charcoal, so that the smoke and fumes that came from it would make me mysterious in the proper Delphic oracle way. Then I pressed a pillow against my eyes, and announced in a chanting voice what I could see,

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and Hans interpreted these signs, and from them deduced the commands from on high, which were that he and the Schweinwald children would have to go right away to the Old Market Place and do the puppet theater. I was absolutely furious that they should want to start without me, because we'd planned it all together a long time ago to earn some money, and we'd made puppets and built a stage and rehearsed wonderful plays, and people were going to be terrifically impressed—and Hans and I were going to take turns going around with the plate, and later on maybe we might travel all around the world with this show of ours. Of course I was angry that they wanted to start without me, and were just making use of me as an oracle. And then, to cap everything, Hans had to say in front of the Schweinwald children, that I, being the oracle, was just an inferior tool; the truly sublime being was he, the interpreter. This was really more than I could stand, so I announced, in a chanting voice, "Hans is a horrid pig." It was a pity we couldn't have a proper fight because I was ill in bed. Hans ran off, in a fury, and the Schweinwalds went with him. The stinking smoking charcoal they left behind them, and I began to feel sick.

When I went back to school, my mother gave me an excuse note to give to our form mistress, Miss Schnei. Miss Schnei hardly even glanced at it and tossed it very quickly into her desk drawer. I kept thinking about that all the time.

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Since I had fallen out with Hans and couldn't earn money with the puppet theater, and soon it would be Easter, I thought I had better do a different deal altogether and sell my old schoolbooks to someone in the class below me. I didn't let them know about this at home. I simply said I would so much like to look at my old schoolbooks again, to learn things from them and see whether I had forgotten anything. They thought this was an excellent thing, but they couldn't understand it, and didn't really believe it.

I had already been conducting some very difficult negotiations with Mutti Kugel, who is in the class below me. She is the most stupid child you can possibly imagine. She is always thinking she won't move up this Easter and so she is afraid to let her mother give her money for schoolbooks for the next year. But I am selling the things to her at bargain price. It's true the books don't look very beautiful any more, and as a matter of fact everybody knows that of course Mutti Kugel won't move up, but I use all the power I have to persuade her that she will, to cheer her up and to get her to buy the books.

I told Mr. Kleinerz next door all about it, and he said he thought it would be easier to sell a pair of gentleman's trousers to a Mother Superior than do a deal with Mutti Kugel. I can see sometimes what a hard time my father has being a businessman.

It was so frightfully difficult getting a payment on

### *When I Was a Child Prodigy*

account from Mutti Kugel. I felt absolutely exhausted, like my father sometimes. In the end I got a bit of money from her, and I went straight away to look for my two best friends. We all three of us had had the most terrible time that morning, already. Gretchen actually cried, and we had to console her. Twenty-seven mistakes she had in her French dictation! That didn't worry her particularly, but she was told to bring the exercise book with her tomorrow with her mother's signature on it, and the silly idiot didn't have the sense to say at once that unfortunately her mother was away on a Scandinavian cruise. That's what Gretchen was crying about.

We had arranged everything between us ages ago. We were always being told to ask our parents to visit the school, and then afterward we would find out that our teachers just said beastly things about us to them, and then we had nothing but trouble at home. So we simply made our parents lead a wonderfully interesting life, like that smart Mrs. von Krahwald who lives underneath us. We just told our teachers, rather sadly, that our parents were constantly traveling all over the world. We always made them go as far away as possible so that they couldn't come back too quickly. A lot of it, of course, we knew from geography, and then Mr. Kleinerz always helped me. Elli, Gretchen, and I were always absolutely fair about dividing up the countries. For a long time I kept my parents in Egypt, and Elli

### *The Bad Example*

said her father was taking part in a dangerous expedition through the heart of South America.

For Gretchen we had specially kept a Scandinavian cruise in reserve. And then she forgot to make use of it! Of course Gretchen must have been worn to a shred with her nerves, like our mothers often are. Elli and I were worn to shreds with our nerves as well so we decided we would take some time off, like grownups. After all, I had got the money from Mutti Kugel, so we could just as well spend the morning in Monatto's ice-cream parlor instead of going to school. And that's why we secretly took the old excuse notes from our parents out of Miss Schnei's drawer. Gretchen had been ill for a day during the last school year, and Elli had been ill for two days, and there was still the letter from my mother that said I had had a bad cold for two days.

Terribly exciting and cloudy and gray was that morning we passed in Monatto's ice-cream parlor. We ate lemon ice with nuts, one helping after another, and raspberry and vanilla too—that was what I liked best. All the others in our class were working at a horrid bit of math which I couldn't possibly have managed. We laughed at the top of our voices, derisively, because we didn't have to do it, and we actually threw our book bags on the floor and used them as footstools.

Next day I had to play truant with Elli alone, because Gretchen's excuse note had expired. We didn't have any money left for ice cream. We stood on the sus-

### *When I Was a Child Prodigy*

pension bridge and froze, and kept spitting into the Rhine. We were dreadfully scared that we would be found out, and idiotically we took our excuse notes out of our bags and kept looking at them wondering if Miss Schnei would notice that we had cut off the dates.

The Rhine flowed by, magnificent and wild. From one of those pillars the other day, a man jumped right into it. Could you do that? Elli asked me. I didn't know. I had a feeling I would like to fall into the river. And then, a little while later, I actually wanted to jump, for a moment. And I got scared. I mesmerized myself quite giddy with looking down into the water. Gray and cold it looked, and angry, without sun or love or—Father in heaven, my letter was gone! I screamed. My letter was swimming in the Rhine. I didn't drop it on purpose—and yet I did do it on purpose. I kept thinking, there will be terrible things lying in wait in the world if the letter disappears, there will be something terrible in store for me. And then, I wanted the letter to drop from the bridge. And yet at the same time, I didn't want it to. And then, as well as that, I started thinking everything will be changed then, interesting and warm. We wouldn't be freezing on this icy bridge any more, bored to death; we'd be terribly excited. I don't know why I did it. And it's an absolute fact that I was terribly frightened myself, but I was glad as well. I could never tell Elli I did it on purpose. She thought it was an ac-

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cident. I was ashamed and felt somehow guilty, I don't know why.

First we thought all was lost. Then I remembered that there was another note in Miss Schnei's desk from the time when I was away for seven days because of the piles of candied fruit. I didn't feel improper and glad any more; I was just frightened in an ordinary way; and wanted not to be found out. Elli and Gretchen would bring me the seven-day note tomorrow, after school, and I would have to sit through the whole seven days somehow. There was nothing else I could do.

My life wasn't nice any more at all. Every morning I had to leave home punctually with my books, so as not to arouse suspicion. I used to wander around the parts of the town that were far away from school, so that no one would see me. My feet got tired. It kept on raining. I sat on lonely benches in horrid wet parks, and I felt like crying.

And then one day I was passing by the museum, and who should be coming toward me but Father Hohm. Thank goodness he is a very pious and severe man with eyes turned inward, who does not perceive the comings and goings of the street. So I just managed to slip into the museum before he had seen me.

I felt a bit jumpy, because I had never been in a museum before, but I knew quite well that you walk about and are supposed to inspect everything like in old castles. And then I began to be glad that I didn't have

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to walk around in the rain any more. I would escape into the museum every day.

At first I was too scared to go up the stairs, and I just walked about downstairs. There were pieces of money, whole heaps of them, and stones piled on top of each other as if Rudi Knippes had been playing with his box of blocks, and some dull glasses and jugs. But then I went farther along, and there I saw something absolutely stunning—a glass coffin with a real mummy inside. Hans and I have read a book called *The Eternal Secret of the Sphinx*. There was all about it in there, and now I know that what the book said was true. Our Elise hadn't wanted to believe it. I was terribly excited. Never before in my whole life have I seen anything so wonderful.

An attendant came toward me. My legs folded under me with fright. I thought, now he'll chase me away from the mummy, or else he'll take down my name and report me at school, for children are bound not to be allowed to do anything interesting and they aren't let into the movies either are they? But the attendant was quite friendly, and pulled my hair, and told me all about the mummy—how old it was, and why the Egyptians wrapped it up like that. I said I thought it looked like Miss Biernack, my piano teacher, and the attendant too thought that might be perfectly possible. The other day, he said, he suddenly got a terrifying feeling that the mummy had come alive again and was

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standing beside its own coffin, looking into it with great interest. But when he got up to it he saw that the mummy was still under glass. The other mummy was an old American lady. The real mummy wasn't anything like so wrinkled. Then the attendant also showed me some pictures, which he told me had cost a terrific lot of money and were admired by people all over the world. But I thought the pictures were nowhere near as good as the mummy, and the attendant said yes, she was unusually handsome.

Next day I went straight to the mummy and to the two skeleton's tombs which the attendant had also showed me. The skeletons in the graves have been given some money for the journey into the Beyond, but in heaven you don't need any money and in hell they are bound to take it away from you. I think it would be a much better idea always to give children a bit of money to carry around with them.

Then once I wandered upstairs which is called the Antique Department. Pictures, pictures, pictures, nothing but pictures . . . saints, all covered with blood. I've seen them thousands of times in church. It's true the pictures were colored but they weren't a bit beautiful. The only one that was interesting was "Saint Anthony Plagued by Demons." And even that was nowhere near as interesting as the mummy.

When I decided I would go downstairs again to have another look at the mummy, I got to a small room and

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there I saw an enormous terrible picture called "The Last Judgment." On one side it had lots of beautiful naked girls with yellow curly hair being led into a church by angels, and on the other side were some perfectly dreadful devils pinching some very fat greenish people. The devils had a second face in their bellies, with horrible red tongues. I was terribly frightened. Good heavens, if I were to drop dead this very moment the devils would take me with their fiery claws. Not a single angel would help me. For I was so full of sin. I would have liked to confess and atone there and then, and pray for forgiveness and guidance—I couldn't help crying, because I would have given anything to be good. "Oh look at this child! How deeply moved she is in the presence of art!" a voice said suddenly behind me, very loud and harsh, in broken German.

I got such a shock, I turned round very quickly. An old lady was standing near me. Like an Englishwoman she looked. On Sunday there was one just like her traveling on the Rhine steamer to Konigswinter. There was a little man with white poodle hair with her. I tried to dash past them, but the lady grabbed hold of me. She stroked my chin. I almost bit her. Was I so very interested in painting? Yes. She held me tighter and stared at me with the same look in her eyes as teachers have in scripture lessons. I was feeling terrible. If only she would let me go. How old was I? Eleven. Then she heaved a sigh, and the poodly man put his hand on my

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head. I can't stand that sort of thing. Did I paint, myself? Yes. Well, in the drawing class, we've got to paint, haven't we. "Aha," said the lady.

And the little man nodded his head. And they said the attendant had told them I had come there yesterday too. Yes. Why was I so shy? Why did I tremble so? Was I worried about something? "Oh do let me go!" I screamed. I thought they were devils who had changed into human shape to punish and torment me. Then the lady spoke to the gentleman. I was surely an infant prodigy, and my tender artistic soul was suffering under adverse circumstances and harsh surroundings. Then all at once I saw the lady was not a devil at all; she admired me. But then she started asking me where I lived, because she wanted to take an interest in me. I tore myself away from her with all my strength and ran.

That afternoon my mother called me into the sitting room. I could tell straight away by her voice that something unpleasant had happened, but as a matter of fact it wasn't something unpleasant but something dreadful. The lady from the museum was sitting on our settee. Dear God, dear God, if only I hadn't told that nice attendant where I lived and what my name was. I felt as if I was going to be sick. My legs couldn't move any more. My mother said, "This lady says she saw you yesterday and today in the museum. How do you come to be there all alone, every morning?" I wanted to say it wasn't me, but suddenly I had no strength left at all.

## *When I Was a Child Prodigy*

I just said nothing. Did I have any drawings? The lady would like to see the drawings I had made, my mother said, and she added that up to now all I had ever painted were a lot of ugly little men which I very naughtily painted on the light-colored wallpaper in the bedroom, and I never got more than two out of twenty in drawing class. I said nothing. They kept asking me questions, but I said nothing. Then the lady heaved a sigh. "Poor child." It was a crime to allow a talent to wither and to suppress it. Then my mother got angry. The lady said all right, she would go, but she would come back again.

If only I hadn't told my mother that Miss Schnei had sent me to the museum. Grownups always interfere in children's affairs, and of course my mother telephoned sly Schnei that same evening before I had had a chance to break the phone. I would have done it. I just didn't care any more by then what I did. When my mother spoke, I could hear her voice right down in my stomach. It hurt me. She said I was quite upset. How could anyone send a child in that state of mind to the museum by herself. She said she felt really angry about it. "I beg your pardon? No child has been sent to the museum? But . . ."

Questions, questions, questions. How can grownups torture children the way they do? They telephoned backward and forward, to Elli's father, to Gretchen's mother, and more and more came out. I couldn't sleep all night. I kept on thinking of the mummy and the

### *The Bad Example*

"Last Judgment," and whether maybe I really was an infant prodigy like the Englishwoman said and was just misunderstood. And I thought that perhaps if I really wanted to very hard I could will myself to die on the spot, and not have to go through the next day with all its horrors.

But I did have to go through the next day. And so did Elli and Gretchen. We sat in the headmistress's room and cried dreadfully. Gretchen's mother was there, and so was mine, and so was fat Mr. Puckbaum. He laughed every now and again, and then opened his eyes wide, pretending to be frightened whenever the mothers stared at him indignantly.

Then our headmistress came out with Miss Schnei. They immediately sneaked up to our parents, in a nasty sly way and no one took any notice of us. But that was still to come. It was terrible. "Perhaps the children have been left too much to themselves. You have taken some very long journeys," said Miss Schnei. "Well, in the holidays I took the children to the Eiffel mountains," said my mother. I thought everyone would hear my heart beating. "I do hope you are satisfied with the success of your expedition, Mr. Puckbaum?" our headmistress asked sweetly. "Well, I suppose you might call it a kind of expedition like," said Mr. Puckbaum. He is a travelling saleman in wines, and he almost always talks with a Cologne accent. "Yes, I suppose you could call it a little expedition like." That beastly old headmistress

### *When I Was a Child Prodigy*

never stopped asking questions. "Did you have any fights with savages?" Mr. Puckbaum banged his fist on the table. "You never spoke a truer word, Miss. Savages is just what they are. Real savages." Things became more and more terrible and nerve-racking. Elli began to sob out loud. "Have you brought back a wealth of material, Mr. Puckbaum?"

"Well no, I wouldn't quite say that. In the Hunsrück hills, you know, they go in more for beer like."

Everything came out then, absolutely everything. We cried frightfully, and our mothers cried too. Mr. Puckbaum said he couldn't bear to witness so much sorrow. Wouldn't the ladies let him get them a brandy like, and let bygones be bygones?

They said we were beyond redemption, the only place for us was an institution, and it would take many years to wipe this out. They said I was the ringleader. They intended to make an example of me. For the present we were to return to our classrooms.

We just didn't want to live any longer. And we might easily have died of sorrow. Because no one spoke to us. And when it was time to go home, we were afraid to go. But Mr. Puckbaum came to call for us. He said, "Well, you kids! Well, I don't know! That was a pretty bad business you little devils were up to. If you ever put me among the Red Indians in South America again, Elli, I'll Red Indian you I can tell you. And for heaven's

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sake, stop crying! Come along to the pastry shop and have a cup of cocoa. You look like a lot of corpses."

We each had five pieces of cream cake, and I can tell you we needed it.

We began to feel better. Mr. Puckbaum said he was only interested in exerting an educational influence on us, and he did it there and then. He said it had all happened because I had run into the museum, and because of the silly old woman who had taken me for an infant prodigy. Now a beautiful folk song, he said, had something to be said for it. But all other kinds of art were extremely dangerous, and we should take good care to keep away from them. He said he knew lots of people who had gone to the dogs just because they had got mixed up with art, and hadn't we had a taste of it ourselves only that very day? Well then, we should let that be a lesson to us.

*My Grand Passion*

One evening my mother comes into my room and says, "Whatever are you doing?" "Why," I say, "what should I be doing? I'm not doing anything." I was scared to death, and I quickly tucked my feet under the blankets, and the French dictionary, too, that I had been spitting on to paint my toenails red. The French dictionary has a red cover that runs. And I wanted so terribly to be as beautiful and elegant as Rena Dunkel, especially now that I'm passionately in love. Rena Dunkel is always painting her nails. I suffer terribly. Many people in the past have died for love. It will be a miracle if everything ends well. Anyway, you should always be prepared like the old Princesses of the East, who were so often passionately loved. Rena Dunkel has some novels about all that. And tomorrow afternoon, I shall go to Theo Samander and tell him that never in my life will I marry any man but him, for it is he I love. I am desperately frightened. My heart keeps hammering away like mad. Every day for three weeks now I have been meaning to go to him, but tomorrow I really will. I shall have to go tomorrow,

### *The Bad Example*

because I have vowed to Rena and to Elli Puckbaum, my best friend, that tomorrow I will do the greatest deed of my life. I didn't tell them exactly what it was all about, but now they are waiting for this great deed, and a vow must always be kept. I have privately framed my vow in a specially ghastly way so as to make it impossible for me to get cold feet at the last moment. I say to myself in bed at night, quite firmly, "If I don't go to Theo Samander tomorrow, then one of my eyes will fall out of my head, and my mother will never love me again, and my father will find out that I have secretly sold the stamp collection that he had when he was a boy, because I so terribly wanted to have thin lisle stockings like Gretchen Katz and Elli Puckbaum, and all they ever buy for me are those thick ribbed ones that Aunt Milly gets."

Now I have bound myself by this terrible oath, and so tomorrow I go to Theo Samander, although actually I'd much rather love from afar.

I am now thirteen, and it is crazy and criminal to treat me like a child. It will be another three years yet before I can marry. It is a long time, but this time too will pass, and Theo Samander and I will wait.

Only yesterday, Elli and I met Lydia Grohmann in the baths. She speaks to us sometimes, even though she is two forms above us, and she told us that we needn't worry at all about our development. We already had the beginnings of bosoms.

### *My Grand Passion*

Elli and I have been wondering just how marriage and passionate love are linked up, and whether perhaps it has something to do with having babies. This business of having babies is something that is still not quite clear, but we think it has something to do with true love. Once we tried to read all about it in the library, secretly, at the Puckbaum's, because Gretchen Katz said her boy cousin had told her you could read all about it in the encyclopedia. She looked for the word "childbearing" in the encyclopedia, but of course Gretchen had let her cousin make a fool of her. The word "childbearing" isn't even in the encyclopedia.

Anyway, I am sure it has nothing to do with love. After all, I've read quite enough books and plays to know that love means to hold each other in a fervent embrace. That is what I am going to do. Sometimes too, you are smothered in passionate kisses. I don't think I'd care for that very much. At Christmas I always have to kiss all our relations who have come to visit, and they kiss me back. My face always gets disgustingly wet, and I run out of the room to wipe it all off. It always makes everyone think that I am sensitive, and have been overcome with emotion. As a matter of fact I have, but I wipe it all off just the same. But I would be very happy to love Theo Samander passionately without burning kisses. I would like to die for him, and to make great sacrifices for him. And more than anything I would like to save him. The most wonderful thing would be to rescue him

### *The Bad Example*

from a burning house. He would be saved, but a falling beam would crash down on my head and I would lose consciousness, and everyone would kneel around me sobbing. Sometimes when I am in bed at night, I think about it. And I would like to weep in front of him, and keep saying how bad I am. I dream that then he lays his hand on my head and draws me to him, and consoles me. The consoling bit is by far the most beautiful. Whenever I think about it, I feel like crying. "Someone who weeps as you do, and is so unhappy, must be noble indeed," he will say, deeply moved, and then I shall find myself in his arms. He tries to comfort me, but I refuse to be comforted, because I can never quite imagine what would happen after he had comforted me, because after all the best part would be over then.

And then, sometimes, instead, I want to be carried jubilantly into the mountains where the herds of sheep are, like Pedro carries Martha in the opera *Tiefland*. But what happens after Pedro has got Martha into the mountains and put her down? Is that the end of the wonderful part? I think the most beautiful and noble part of love is the despair beforehand. Yet my mother loves my father too, and isn't a bit despairing, except now and then about me. I have a feeling that this is not real passionate love like you get in operas, and like I have now.

I have to thank Rena for this passionate love. She has been divorced, and she is a distant cousin of my mother's,

### *My Grand Passion*

and for the past seven weeks she has been staying with us. Aunt Milly dislikes her, my mother dislikes her, all the women dislike her. But she has shown me a letter from the most wonderful man, who wrote that she was as beautiful as one of God's angels. And she is. She has a nightdress made of very soft blue silk and hair like gold, and lashes like little black fans. Every single day since Rena has been here Mr. Kleinerz has come to see us, and my father never raises his voice to me at lunch-time now that Rena is staying with us. My mother said to Aunt Milly that she'd like it better if he would fly into a temper again like he always used to, and shout in the old way:

Rena is always laughing, but sometimes she spends the whole morning in the bathroom and lies in the bath for hours and hours. She told me that sometimes in the morning she is inflicted with fits of depression—sorrows, that is—and they get better quickest if she has a bath. They never let me stay in the bath for more than twenty minutes at the very most, but when I'm grown up I'll do like Rena. She reads in her bath, and she smokes cigarettes in her bath, and she's even eaten oranges in her bath. Aunt Milly says this is depraved, and entirely in keeping with the whole picture she has formed of her.

At night Rena sometimes sits on my bed, and cries, and talks of love. She is waiting for a man who is supposed to be coming to Cologne. And then I fell in love

### *The Bad Example*

too, because Rena took me to the opera twice, and once they did *Teifland* and the other time *Tannhäuser*, and both times Theo Samander sang—Pedro and *Tannhäuser*. I felt like crying afterward, and I simply couldn't say a word. I wanted to become worthy and out of this world, and to kill everything impure in me, and even to give up eating. But unfortunately I couldn't keep it up.

I have been to Theo Samander. I have been to his house. He lives on the Hohenzollernring, rather high up actually. At every landing I sat down on the stairs and struggled with myself because I felt like running away. I had secretly put on a light gray dress and jacket that belong to Rena. The skirt was so dreadfully long and wide I had to roll it into a fat sausage at the waist, underneath the jacket. You couldn't see it, but somewhere or other the skirt always seemed to sag. Anyway, I know definitely I looked absolutely grown up. I would have liked to ask Rena to lend me her fox fur but she wasn't there. I found an old fox fur of my mother's in the attic, and I put that on. It immediately gives you a totally different personality. But under the street lights I discovered that unfortunately there were hardly any hairs left on the fox. My mother is absolutely right, the way she is always after moths. When you come to think of it, the fur looked more like a bit of chamois leather than anything else really, so I decided I would simply carry it nonchalantly over my arm.

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I had some flowers too—a large bunch of lilacs that I had pinched the evening before from the park, at the risk of my life. Unfortunately, I was in such a tearing hurry and excitement I kept breaking the branches off too short, and on top of that I had to keep them hidden in my wardrobe overnight so that no one should see them. So the bunch was not actually as beautiful as I should have liked.

Upstairs I rang the bell, and a little woman opened the door. Her face was a little bit wrinkled, with large brown eyes, and she said that Mr. Samander wasn't at home. I almost heaved a sigh of relief, but then Love came flooding back over me, and for Love you must fight to the very end. And as I had come so far anyway, I went into the room and sat down on a chair and said I would wait for him. The little woman looked at me and asked if it was important. If not perhaps I could leave a message with her. She was Mrs. Samander. I said immediately that it was the most important thing in the world.

Then the woman went into another room. I had such a funny feeling in my stomach and I began to have pins and needles in my left leg. The apartment smelled so shut-in and stuffy. A clock kept ticking. There was a laurel wreath on the wall with a red and gold ribbon, and a picture of Theo Samander exultantly waving a tankard. I had never thought about him having a wife, but I couldn't possibly let it make any difference now.

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He would simply have to divorce her. After all, Rena is divorced. I thought over everything I was going to say to him very carefully. Never again would a woman love him so passionately as I. And of course he would see that at once.

Then the woman came back and said, "Would you like a cup of tea, dear? Or perhaps I should call you, my dear young lady?" I replied, in a perfectly calm and grown-up voice, "Surely you must realize that in three years' time I shall be ready for marriage."

I felt terribly hot and wanted to take my jacket off. In my excitement I did too. My skirt slipped down immediately. So I said quickly that I was absolutely freezing, and put the jacket on again.

We had some tea, and mine went down the wrong way. The whole room was full of the most marvelous laurel wreaths. Wherever you looked there were heaps and heaps of laurel wreaths, and on one of the ribbons someone had written, "To that divine singer." Ah, I had always known that he was divine. I was sorry for the woman, but when I married Theo Samander we would have to take all the laurel wreaths with us.

She pressed me to eat some of the bread and raspberry jelly. I would have liked to very much, but I was embarrassed because I thought I might make a mess in front of her, and all over Rena's suit. Then the woman simply went ahead and spread some for me. I thought,

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well maybe we might let her have two or three of the laurel wreaths.

I told her a bit about school, and she told me her husband was having a solo rehearsal for *Tristan*. She was so nice, I didn't mind if she kept half the laurel wreaths. After all Theo Samander would always be getting new ones.

Then suddenly the phone rang, and the woman said she was sorry but her husband wouldn't be coming home after the rehearsal; he was going to have a meal out and then go straight on to the performance. So I had to go. The woman very nicely asked me to come again soon.

On the stairs I thought that after all, I didn't really want any of the wreaths. I thought what a frightful shame it is that just because a man has one wife already he can't have another as well. It would be the simplest thing in the world, wouldn't it? I wonder why it isn't allowed.

As a matter of fact I didn't want to go to Theo Samander's any more. After all, I had kept my vow. Now I preferred to go on loving from afar, and dreaming of him at night.

As it happened, Rena, thank goodness, didn't even ask me about my Great Deed. She had something else to think about. But Elli left me no peace, and she already knew a bit about my passionate love, and admired

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me, and did my math for me, and pulled daisy petals to foretell my love. I just couldn't tell her what had really happened, because after all there was nothing to tell. So I told her I had been to Theo Samander's house, but I had promised to say nothing about it. Elli immediately got frightfully excited and said, "Oh I do envy you. Did you kiss each other?" I thought for a minute and said, "No. With our hands intertwined, we went toward the sun." I know from books this is what lovers always do. "Inside the room?" asked Elli. And I said, "Yes, inside the room—from the door to the window," though usually it's flowering heather and cornfields. And then in the end I told Elli that he knelt down before me and sang to me.

Every day I had to tell Elli something else. My passionate love became more and more passionate, and everything was as beautiful as if it had really happened. And as I told it to Elli I sometimes really believed it myself.

And now everything is ghastly. Rena can't help me. She has gone; she's going to marry a man who is the lowest thing in the world—a schoolteacher. In a little village on the Ahr. Rena herself said she would be surprised if it turned out all right, but Love is something you can't fight against. When I find out where she is I shall seek refuge with her.

Today I have to see our headmistress. My head is

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bursting. I can't cry any more. It was all Elli's fault, really. She had sworn never to reveal my secret to a living soul. Then she couldn't bear it any longer, and she told Cordula Minnig and made her swear she would never tell anyone else. Then Cordula Minnig told Lissy Jungklang, and Lissy Jungklang did the most beastly thing of the lot—she went and told her father. So then she wasn't allowed to go to school any more, and Professor Jungklang came to school to see the head and said he could not allow his innocent child to be defiled in this cesspit, where a precocious corrupted creature is having an affair with a tenor. The precocious creature is me.

I ran away from school. Elli ran after me, although there was still drawing to come. And then we sat on a bench in the park. Elli wants to suffer with me, and make amends with me, and give me her golden rosary. I don't want to take it, because she doesn't know yet that I made it all up. She thinks we can go to Theo Samander and escape with him. Dear God!

Elli will find out I lied to her. The head and Professor Jungklang won't believe me if I say I made it all up. I'm sure to be expelled. By tonight my parents will know everything. And when I think that perhaps Theo Samander will hear about it all—and maybe his wife too—then my head burns as if I have a fever.

Of course, I shall never live through it. But if I do,

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then I shall never again love passionately. Never, never, never, as long as I live. Love is the most awful thing there is in the world, and the pangs of love are something that a girl on her own simply cannot bear. I know all about it now.









*(Continued from front flap)*

ranging from a letter written to the government advocating a quick end to the war, to the tossing of a skull through an old lady's window. Both as pure comedy and as a child's-eye view of the hypocrisy of the adult world, the book is a delight from start to finish.

### IRMGARD KEUN

was born in Berlin and published her first book in 1931, when she was twenty-one. With Hitler's rise to power, she went to Holland where she continued to write and publish novels in German until the Nazis invaded the Lowlands. To escape entrapment, Miss Keun took the extraordinary and dangerous step of returning to Germany with false papers. For the remainder of the war she lived in hiding in Cologne and then in Berlin. At war's end she returned to the ruins of her parents' home in Cologne, where she now lives. *The Bad Example* is Miss Keun's second novel to appear in this country.

*Translated by Leila Berg and Ruth Baer*

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